

# Commission support to fight hunger in sub-Saharan Africa

Commendable but insufficient focus on sustainability and impact



EUROPEAN  
COURT  
OF AUDITORS

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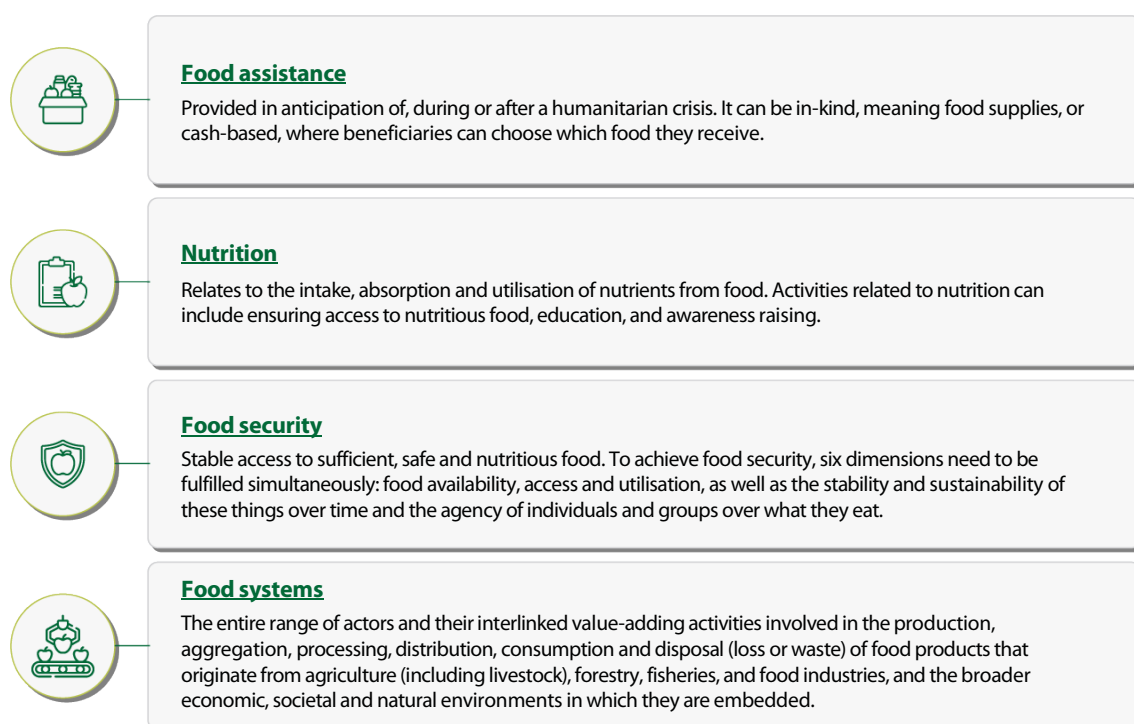
# 01

## Main messages

### Why this area is important

- 01** Hunger remains a critical global challenge, affecting millions of people across the world. Addressing this issue is a central tenet of [the United Nations sustainable development goals](#), on which the EU is a committed partner. Fighting hunger involves a range of activities related to food assistance, nutrition, food security and food systems (see [Figure 1](#)).

**Figure 1 | Definition of concepts related to fighting hunger**



Source: Commission and Food and Agriculture Organization.

- 02** Despite global progress in many areas, the continuing presence of hunger remains one of humanity's most pressing challenges. Hundreds of millions of people worldwide still experience chronic hunger, with acute food insecurity affecting millions more due to conflicts, climate shocks and economic disruption. The EU actively participates in global initiatives (see paragraph [57](#)) to reduce food insecurity and malnutrition, including funding food aid, supporting sustainable agriculture and sustainable food systems, and fostering international partnerships. Despite these efforts, challenges persist and external factors such as conflict, climate change and global economic disparities exacerbate food insecurity. Sub-Saharan Africa has been particularly vulnerable to these external factors. Rising inequality and inflationary pressures, as well as the aftershocks of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have further heightened vulnerabilities.
- 03** EU funding to fight hunger is provided through humanitarian assistance, which is under the responsibility of the Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), and through development cooperation, which is a responsibility of the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA). Globally, the EU concluded contracts amounting to €17 billion for hunger relief initiatives between 2014 and 2020, and to €6.2 billion between 2021 and 2024. Sub-Saharan Africa received the largest amount of this funding at over €11 billion, representing 48 % of the total.
- 04** The audit focused on development cooperation actions addressing food security, sustainable aquatic and agri-food systems, and nutrition. The audit was carried out by means of on-the-spot visits to Ethiopia, Kenya and Zambia, desk reviews for Chad, Niger and South Sudan, interviews with relevant stakeholders, and analysis of documents for all countries in sub-Saharan Africa.
- 05** The funding provided by DG INTPA and DG ECHO on fighting hunger between 2021 and 2024 (see paragraph [03](#)) represents a significant investment. Alongside its member states, the EU remains the world's largest provider of development aid and is making considerable efforts to adapt its support to growing global needs, particularly in the current challenging context. Given the scale of these efforts and the substantial funding involved, it is important to assess whether the EU's actions are delivering the intended results and meeting evolving demands in the fight against hunger.
- 06** It has been over a decade since we conducted a performance audit in this area ([special report 01/2012](#): "Effectiveness of EU development aid for food security in sub-Saharan Africa"). This audit offers a timely opportunity to assess the progress made since 2012 and provide insights that will guide future EU actions. These findings can also be valuable input to the planning of the next multiannual financial framework.

**07** We examined whether the Commission targeted and implemented its actions to fight hunger in sub-Saharan Africa effectively (see paragraphs [07-12](#) – [Annex I](#)). More specifically, we assessed whether:

- o the Commission’s development actions to fight hunger addressed the most relevant needs and priorities; and
- o the Commission had implemented these actions effectively.

With our report, we aim to contribute to improving the effectiveness of future funding by strengthening the sound financial management of EU action in the field of food security, food systems and nutrition. More background information and details on the audit scope and approach can be found in [Annex I](#).

## What we found and recommend

**08** Overall, we found that the Commission has made valuable efforts to combat food insecurity and malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa, but that its actions have not always targeted those with the greatest needs and lacked sufficient focus on impact and sustainability. The lack of a clear and documented methodology for prioritising regions or target groups, coupled with needs that exceed the funds available, has constrained the overall effectiveness of the interventions. Although coordination has been satisfactory, weaknesses in project design and monitoring, and challenges in addressing the underlying root causes of food insecurity have negatively impacted the sustainability of projects. While EU actions have been aligned with partner countries’ policies, and the Commission’s actions have contributed to progress, significant challenges persist in reducing malnutrition and food insecurity.

### The Commission’s actions did not always address the greatest needs

**09** The EU’s [programming process](#) for international cooperation sets priorities through multiannual indicative programmes. While the 2014–2020 period focused on food security and nutrition, the 2021–2027 programming period has shifted towards sustainable agriculture and aquatic food systems. This shift in focus was reinforced through the Commission’s [Global Gateway](#) initiative (see paragraphs [24-28](#)).

**10** The Commission’s programming documents, as well as the [action documents](#) for each project, promote sustainable solutions to address hunger, such as supporting small-scale farmers, enhancing agricultural productivity or promoting resilient food systems. However,



detailed assessments of food insecurity, malnutrition and their root causes by region or population group were often lacking. Moreover, there was no methodology based on transparent and relevant criteria to identify and target the most relevant countries, regions and provinces for the Commission's efforts to address food insecurity and malnutrition (see paragraphs 29-34).

- 11** We looked at a sample of projects and found that they generally responded to the needs of beneficiaries. However, evidence was not always available that support had targeted those geographical areas or population groups that were most in need and on which it was likely to have the highest impact (see paragraph 35 and *Box 1*).



### **Recommendation 1**

#### **Strengthen targeting and document the criteria applied to prioritise development support for fighting hunger**

The Commission should establish and document clear criteria for targeting the most relevant geographical areas and needs, taking into account the different contexts in which the support is provided. These should also take account of available data on the root causes of chronic or acute food insecurity and malnutrition at country and regional level.

**Target implementation date: 2027**

- 12** We identified shortcomings in the design of the sampled projects. There was no pre-defined typology of suitable response options, depending on the crisis context in which an action would be implemented, nor guidance for assessing cost-effectiveness. This poses a risk to the alignment of project design with the structural causes of food insecurity. Moreover, cost evaluations lacked thorough documentation, with very few detailed analyses of project budgets and no comparisons of similar costs across projects; this poses risks to efficiency. The projects examined were broadly aligned with the partner countries' priorities and reflected the shift towards an increased focus on developing economic value chains, with less immediate focus on nutritional needs (see paragraphs 36-41).
- 13** We found cases where the lack of community involvement during project design led to reduced effectiveness and sustainability. Short project durations also limited long-term benefits (see paragraphs 42-45 and *Box 2*). Development projects generally lacked the flexibility needed to adapt to unforeseen events, despite being implemented in highly volatile environments (see paragraphs 46-47).



## Recommendation 2

### Strengthen the design of development projects

The Commission should:

- (a) strengthen the link between project design and the underlying structural causes of food insecurity and malnutrition by developing a flexible and context-sensitive typology of response options tailored to different crisis contexts, complemented by guidance on how to assess projects' cost-effectiveness;
- (b) actively engage local communities in project design to ensure interventions are aligned with relevant needs and to enhance long-term sustainability.

**Target implementation date: 2027**

## The Commission's actions were valuable and coordinated satisfactorily, but lacked sufficient focus on impact and sustainability

- 14** The Commission has established a solid framework for implementing the humanitarian-development nexus (a strategy which seeks to connect short-term emergency humanitarian aid with longer-term development assistance and ensure complementarity between them), outlining clear steps for implementation. However, implementation at country level remains weak. While some countries, such as Chad and Ethiopia, have made progress, most sub-Saharan countries lack the necessary frameworks to integrate humanitarian and development efforts effectively. This has limited synergies between interventions, reducing their overall effectiveness (see paragraphs [49-54](#)).





### Recommendation 3

#### Strengthen the implementation of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus

The Commission should ensure that all relevant directorates-general and services are involved in adopting a comprehensive nexus strategy at country level. In addition, the Commission should involve partner countries, where feasible, in preparing joint context analyses and action plans to improve complementarity between humanitarian and development interventions, while also considering the peace dimension. These should include clearly defined roles, responsibilities and coordination mechanisms.

**Target implementation date: 2027**

- 15 Weaknesses in the monitoring and reporting mechanisms for EU-funded projects limit the Commission's ability to oversee their implementation effectively. For various reasons, such as security or resource constraints, the EU delegations conducted few on-the-spot visits. Their reliance on progress reports from implementing partners without cross-verification has resulted in discrepancies between reported and actual results. While some corrective actions have been taken in specific cases, overall monitoring efforts have remained insufficient (see paragraphs [59-63](#) and [70-71](#)).
- 16 For all the projects in our sample, regular coordination meetings were held involving EU delegations, national authorities and other donors. Moreover, the EU delegations ensured consistent engagement with implementing partners through both formal and informal meetings (see paragraphs [57-58](#)).
- 17 The [logical frameworks](#) of the projects in our sample included few outcome indicators, and baselines were missing for several projects. This makes it difficult to demonstrate projects' impact (see paragraphs [64-65](#)).
- 18 Reporting on funding related to food security is complicated by the absence of a common methodology for measuring such funding and by differences in the way it is defined within the donor community. Additionally, when projects have multiple objectives, they can be classified and reported under various sectors. While projects can contribute to multiple sectors, and often do, this practice leads to reporting that can be easily misinterpreted as it results in actual funding amounts per sector being overstated (see paragraphs [66-68](#)).
- 19 The [Global Europe Results Framework](#) has been designed to measure the effectiveness and impact of the EU's external actions and development cooperation. However, the data from the framework stated in the Commission's annual activity report on external action

instruments does not reflect the results achieved and understates outputs and outcomes, as the framework's indicators are not yet well integrated into projects (see paragraph 69).



#### **Recommendation 4**

##### **Reinforce the Commission's monitoring and reporting framework**

The Commission should:

- (a) strengthen project oversight by carrying out risk-based field visits. This should involve prioritising resources for such visits based on specific risk factors, such as the nature and complexity of projects, their level of funding, the past performance of the implementing partners, and security and logistical constraints. The Commission should also systematically request and review supporting documents from implementing partners to strengthen its verification of key data included in progress reports, particularly regarding number of beneficiaries supported and equipment provided;
- (b) enhance logical frameworks by focusing more on identifying appropriate outcome indicators that align with project objectives, and prioritise the establishment of baselines prior to project implementation;
- (c) propose to other donors the development of a common methodology for measuring funding related to food security and nutrition, to ensure consistency in reporting, improve transparency regarding projects' financial contribution to various sectors, and report on progress made by 2027.

**Target implementation date: 2027**

- 20** The EU's interventions in sub-Saharan Africa have achieved mixed results overall. Several sampled projects succeeded in increasing the quality and quantity of harvests and the number of smallholder farmers with fixed-income contracts, or in providing a better understanding of the countries' geological or land management situation. However, most projects failed to address critical linkages to markets, including those for farmers to sell their harvests or access financial services. This shortcoming has limited beneficiaries' ability to fully capitalise on their projects' potential and compromised the projects' sustainability and impact (see paragraphs 73-75 and Box 3).
- 21** Levels of stunted growth and malnutrition have remained high in sub-Saharan Africa, with persistent challenges in addressing food insecurity, malnutrition and other underlying issues. Despite various efforts and interventions, the region continues to face significant obstacles, including climate change, conflict and economic instability. These have hindered progress in addressing stunting and malnourishment (see paragraph 84).

- 22** Sustainability was most evident where beneficiaries contributed financially and took ownership of projects, reinforcing the need for greater community engagement. By contrast, key gaps such as insufficient government integration, donor dependency and a lack of follow-up on project outcomes has hindered the long-term viability of projects (see paragraphs [76-83](#)).



### **Recommendation 5**

#### **Enhance the sustainability of projects**

The Commission should require development projects to include a well-defined, context-sensitive strategy to reinforce local systems and capacities in a sustainable manner. The Commission should also strengthen its framework by assessing, where appropriate, the sustainability of projects 6 months to 1 year after their completion.

**Target implementation date: 2027**

## A closer look at our observations

### The Commission's actions did not always address the greatest needs

**23** Fighting hunger is covered by various policies and frameworks, both at EU and at global level (see [Figure 1 – Annex I](#)). For this section we examined whether:

- the Commission targeted the most relevant countries and thematic priorities;
- the Commission targeted funding within countries effectively to the most relevant areas of intervention and population groups; and
- the projects were well designed and relevant to the needs of the target groups.

### The Commission did not use a clear, documented methodology to prioritise the countries most in need of support

#### The Commission's programming process: needs assessment

**24** Programming is the process through which the EU defines its priorities for international cooperation. For the 2014–2020 programming period, the European Development Fund (EDF) and the Development Cooperation Instrument – Food were the main tools used to finance development actions to fight hunger. These have been replaced by the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe for the 2021–2027 period.

- 25** The programming process consists of preparing and adopting country and regional multiannual indicative programmes (MIPs). The country programmes define “focal sectors” (for the 2014–2020 programming period, set out in national indicative programmes) or “priority areas” (for the 2021–2027 period, set out in the MIP of each partner country) and set the overall financial contribution for the country concerned. In 2023, we published a [special report on the NDICI’s programming](#) outlining the process, identifying deficiencies and making recommendations for improvement.
- 26** For the 2021–2027 programming period, the Commission evaluated the needs of partner countries in collaboration with national governments, to the extent possible, through sector policy dialogue, while taking account of the sometimes volatile and fragile environment. Moreover, the Commission considered national development plans and sectoral strategies when drafting its programming documents. For the countries visited, we found national development plans and strategies to be aligned with the objectives of the EU’s policies on food security, nutrition or food systems.
- 27** During the programming process for the 2021–2027 period, however, the Commission did not cover the situation regarding food insecurity, malnutrition or food systems in its country assessments before deciding whether to designate these areas as priorities in its programming documents. We found that for 11 sub-Saharan countries, these thematic areas were not considered a priority despite the prevalence, to varying degrees, of food insecurity and malnutrition. However, one reason why these issues were not explicitly included in the programming documents is that they were addressed indirectly as part of broader thematic areas (see paragraph [29](#)).
- 28** Despite relevant information being available, the Commission did not systematically target its actions at the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa during the design phase (see paragraph [46](#)), which reduced the support’s effectiveness. The Commission does not have a clear methodology, based on specific and relevant criteria, for identifying and targeting the countries most in need of hunger relief support.

### **The Commission’s programming process: change in focus from food security to sustainable food systems**

- 29** In the previous programming period, food security and nutrition were considered focal sectors. In the current period, however, the Commission places more focus on sustainable aquatic and agricultural food systems (SAAFS). Therefore, the Commission’s development actions to fight hunger are partially covered in broader thematic areas, in line with the [Commission’s priorities for the EU’s international partnerships](#), such as the “green transformation”, “green and resilient economy”, “green deal” or “inclusive and sustainable growth” priority areas. The fact that the priority areas/focal sectors selected in the country

programming documents are so broad limits the strategic focus of EU funding and risks dispersing it too widely, thereby reducing its impact.

- 30** We also found that despite high levels of stunting (i.e. low height-for-age; measured for children under 5) and wasting (where children are too thin for their height) in sub-Saharan Africa, the EU political agenda's focus on nutrition is diminishing. Structural and persistent nutrition crises are therefore frequently losing prominence as priority is given to supporting value chains and food systems. There is a risk that this shift in focus may lead to the issue of chronic nutritional deficiencies being overlooked and jeopardise the progress achieved to date.
- 31** This shift in focus is reinforced through the Commission's [Global Gateway](#) initiative, which prioritises other policy areas such as climate and energy, digitalisation, transport, health, education and research. Hence, Global Gateway projects have not considered food insecurity or malnutrition directly as policy areas.

### Targeting of regions and populations groups at country level

- 32** The Commission's programming documents, as well as the action documents for each project, promote sustainable solutions to address hunger, such as supporting small-scale farmers, enhancing agricultural productivity or promoting resilient food systems. These objectives, though quite broad, align with the [EU's food security policy](#) and [the NDICI – Global Europe framework](#).
- 33** The [NDICI-Global Europe Regulation](#) requires MIPs to set out priority areas and indicative financial allocations, both for the plan as a whole and for each priority area. The MIPs do not justify the distribution of funding between priority areas, population groups or geographical areas in the country concerned, as they had been prepared before the specific financial allocations to each country were known.
- 34** When assessing the MIPs, we noted that the Commission had provided funding for SAAFS-related activities in nearly all sub-Saharan countries. However, there had been no preliminary assessment of the potential impact of such funding prior to its allocation. Hence, the current assessments of the food security landscape do not identify the areas or types of projects that are most likely to generate added value. This poses a risk to the effectiveness and long-term impact of the Commission's development activities.
- 35** Our examination of the sampled projects revealed that in some cases the areas and population groups targeted were not the most pertinent ones. See [Box 1](#) for examples and [Annex II](#) for an overview of the sampled projects.



## Box 1

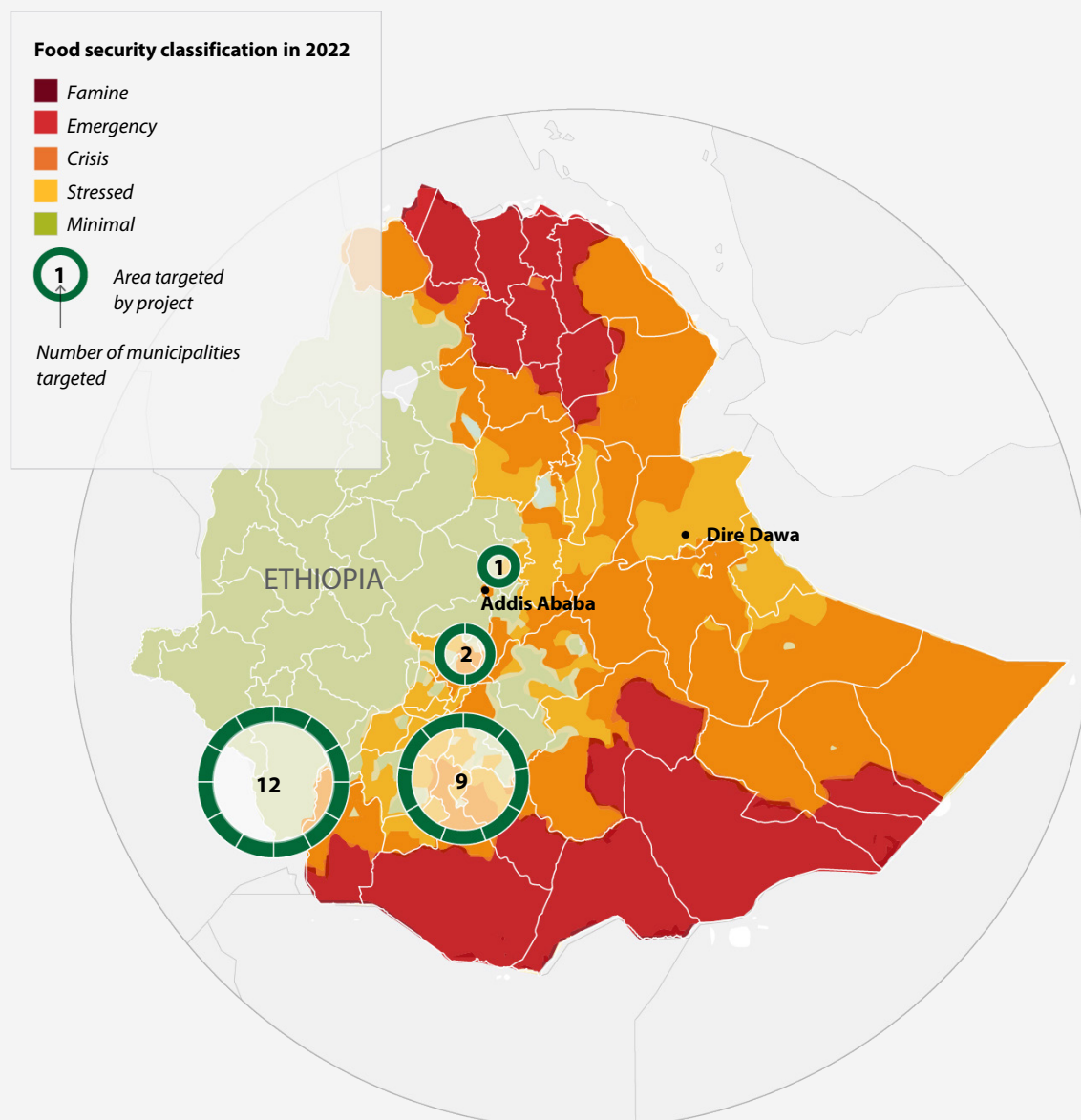
### Inadequate targeting of geographical areas or population groups

#### Project 2 – Ethiopia

The project aims to support effective programming for food security, nutrition and resilience in Ethiopia. However, the project's first component in 2022 (production and dissemination of evidence on food security, livelihoods and disaster risk management) targeted districts that were not experiencing acute food insecurity at that time, rather than areas where more urgent action was needed (see [Figure 2](#)).

The targeting of the project's second component, related to early warnings on livestock condition and health, was more accurate and effective, with most of the selected regions classified as being in an "emergency". However, the targeted areas included two that were classified as "stressed" (rather than in a "crisis" or "emergency") due to volatility and risks to food security. By contrast, some areas already facing crisis or emergency conditions were not prioritised, even though their needs were more urgent.

**Figure 2 | Project 2 Ethiopia – areas of intervention**

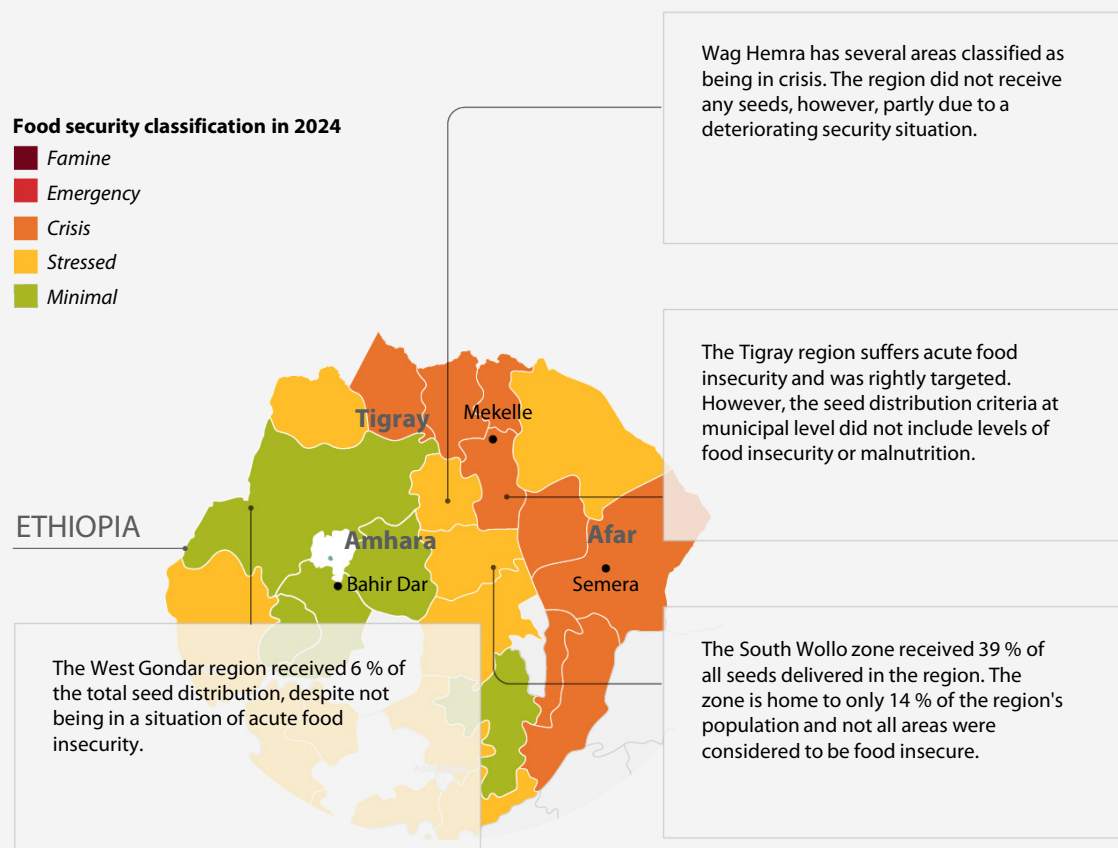


Source: ECA, based on Commission data and Famine Early Warning Systems Network data for Ethiopia in 2022.  
Map source: [lesniewski](#).

### Project 6 – Ethiopia

This project seeks to reduce food insecurity in Ethiopia by focusing on resilient agricultural activities and enhancing productivity through sustainable development of the seed sector. Even though the project's primary objective is to improve food security, the targeting criteria focused on conflict-affected areas, accessibility, vulnerability and agricultural participation but did not include actual levels of food insecurity. As a result, regions with minimal or no food insecurity received seeds ([Figure 3](#)), which undermined the project's ability to reach its potential.

**Figure 3 | Project 6 Ethiopia – Areas of Intervention**



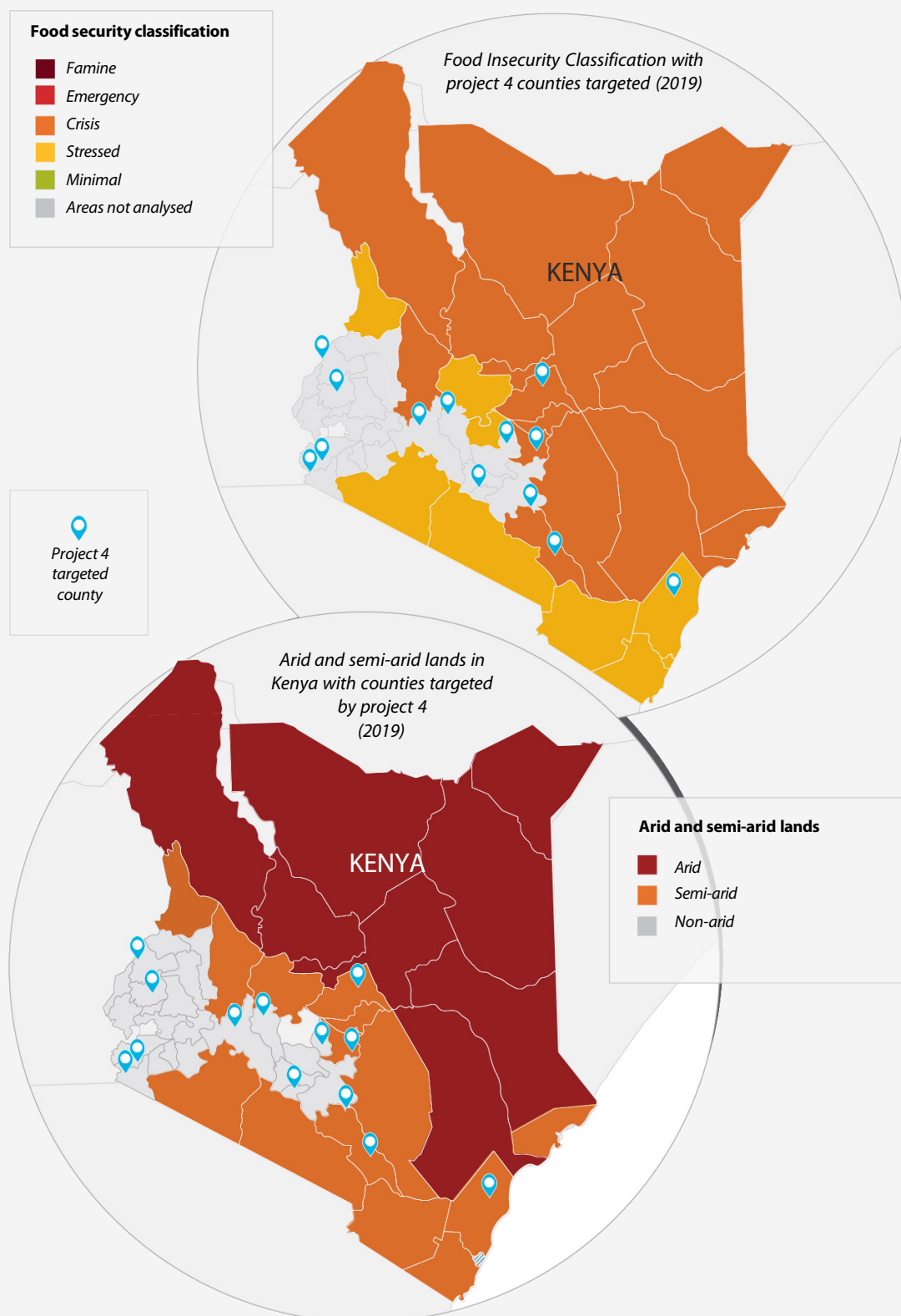
Source: ECA, based on Commission data and Famine Early Warning Systems Network data for Ethiopia in 2024.  
Map source: [lesniewski](#).

### Project 4 – Kenya

The [Agri-Fi programme](#) aligns with the “Food security and resilience to climate shocks in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs)” focal sector of Kenya’s national indicative programme under the 11th EDF. It offers smallholder farmers comprehensive support to integrate into agricultural value chains. The programme consists of four components ([projects 1, 4, 5 and 8](#)).

The second component ([project 4](#)) aims to strengthen the capacities of actors across selected value chains through agricultural technical and vocational education and training. Additionally, it sought to enhance the capacity of the private sector at county level to enforce animal health, food safety and plant health standards. However, the project planning documentation does not specify any targeting of ASALs. The project targeted 13 counties in 2019. Only four of these counties are classified as ASALs at that time (see [Figure 4](#)).

**Figure 4 | Project 4 Kenya – Areas of Intervention**



Source: ECA, based on Commission data, Integrated Food Security Phase Classification data and arid and semi-arid lands for Kenya in 2019.

Map source: Eurostat.

## Although the projects were aligned with EU and partner countries' policies, they had design weaknesses

**36** Project design is built on a comprehensive understanding of the context, clear objectives, and active stakeholder involvement. It includes key components such as assessing needs, choosing an appropriate implementing partner, allocating resources and devising implementation strategies tailored to specific challenges. Effective projects also include monitoring mechanisms and logical frameworks to track progress and ensure accountability. Risk mitigation plans are crucial to ensure adaptability to changing circumstances. In the sections below, we provide an overview of the issues identified in relation to the various components of the selected projects' design.

### Selection of projects and implementing partners

**37** The implementing partners were selected on the basis of:

- (1) a call for proposals; or
- (2) the existence of a legal monopoly (in the case of national government institutions); or
- (3) a direct award (because they either co-financed the project or were explicitly listed as implementing partners in the action document).

For projects implemented under indirect management, the Commission assessed the applicants' administrative, technical and financial capacity. We found that implementing partners generally had the necessary administrative, operational and financial capacity to implement the projects examined.

**38** However, our examination of project 1 in Ethiopia revealed that the action document included plans for an "initial systems audit of the lead and co-applicants through a framework contract prior to signing of a grant contract" to reduce the risk of these applicant's not acting in the EU's interests ("fiduciary risk"). Despite the contract having been signed in 2019, this audit was only carried out in 2022 and resulted in an adverse opinion. The contract – with a value of €10.5 million – therefore should not have been signed with the implementing partner. The systems audit revealed shortcomings in relation to the implementing partner's capacity. Had these shortcomings been addressed before the contract was signed, it could have prevented several performance issues arising during project implementation, such as reporting delays, procurement issues and weaknesses in internal controls. In three other projects (project 1 in Kenya and projects 2 and 3 in Zambia), we also noted system weaknesses as well as issues with procurement procedures.

## Assessment of cost-effectiveness

- 39** The Commission did not systematically assess the reasonableness of project costs. For nearly all the projects in our sample, there was no evidence of the Commission or the EU delegations having analysed the project budget in any level of detail. The Commission relied entirely on general information provided in the projects' progress reports and on the oral explanations provided by the implementing partners. Moreover, the Commission did not compare similar costs between different projects or calculate the cost per beneficiary. This puts the efficiency of projects at risk.
- 40** Most of the sampled projects received the maximum allowable indirect costs (7 % of the project's direct costs). The Commission did not raise any objections or questions when implementing partners requested this rate. Additionally, there is no evidence that the Commission assessed the reasonableness of these costs.

## Projects' alignment with national priorities, EU policies and target groups' needs

- 41** All sampled projects were designed in line with the respective countries' strategies and development plans. This alignment enhances the projects' relevance and potential impact by ensuring that they support the countries' national priorities and address the specific needs of their populations. The projects were also aligned with the Commission's programming documents.
- 42** The needs of the beneficiaries are significant and persistent over time. Given the extent of these needs, and the involvement of all relevant parties – including the government, stakeholders, and other donors – during the project design phase, all projects were structured in such a way as to address beneficiaries' relevant needs.
- 43** We found that project durations were often too short to generate a lasting change for activities such as new seed varieties, or for new business activities to have an impact on smallholder farmers' or agri-businesses' yields and income (see paragraphs [76-83](#)).
- 44** We noted that for all the projects, project steering committees (involving government representatives) or technical working groups were established. However, most projects were designed without involving the local population. Given that they are the ultimate beneficiaries, they are well placed to provide valuable input on potential constraints and the most pressing needs. However, specific circumstances can sometimes complicate direct consultation with local community leaders.



- 45** In some cases, this lack of involvement, as well as other design weaknesses, undermined the sustainability or effective implementation of the projects. See [Box 2](#) for an overview.

## Box 2

### Design flaws undermining effective project implementation and sustainability

Kenya (projects 1, 4, 5 and 8) and Zambia (projects 1, 3, 4 and 5)

In both Kenya (projects 1, 4, 5 and 8) and Zambia (projects 1, 3, 4 and 5), several projects contribute to the same overall objective. However, they have been implemented in silos without achieving complementarities or synergies.

Projects 8 in Kenya and 4 in Zambia were intended to provide loans on favourable terms to applicants for projects 1 in Kenya and 3 in Zambia. These loans were intended to help smallholder farmers expand or diversify their businesses, supporting greater resilience and income opportunities. However, these loans only became available 2 years after the start date of those projects. As a result, the intended beneficiaries were no longer able to take advantage of them. Hence, the bank's existing clients ended up benefiting from the loans, which was not the intended purpose of the project. Moreover, the projects in Zambia did not achieve a link to input markets (such as those for seeds and machinery) or output/sales markets.

#### Project 5 – Kenya

In one of the activities supported by the project, beneficiaries received climate-resilient seeds for 2 years and saw positive results, including increased harvests and better crop quality. However, due to their remote geographical location, they were unable to access these seeds after the project ended. Moreover, the beneficiaries lacked essential tools, such as canvases for drying seeds and sprayers to treat crop pests. By the time they could obtain a sprayer, the crops were already lost. According to the beneficiaries interviewed on the spot, some of these issues could have been mitigated if they had been consulted during the project's design.

#### Project 1 – Zambia

The project aimed to introduce innovative water catchment techniques. In practice, however, boreholes became the primary method used. While the project provided equipment such as water tanks, irrigation pipes and solar pumps, these require maintenance beyond the project's scope. The communities did not have the funds for upkeep and would need to travel to the capital to access the necessary spare parts. Additionally, the project's design did not provide any link to access to financing or to markets.

## Root causes, drivers and flexibility

- 46** As noted in paragraph 28, and despite participating in global initiatives aimed at advancing knowledge on food security (paragraph 57), the Commission did not make sufficient use of available knowledge on the root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa (climate change, conflicts, economic crisis, low national capacities and funding, high level of poverty and inequalities) when designing projects. Only six projects in our sample addressed root causes directly (such as focusing on the impact of climate change by supporting, for example, the construction of sand dams, the application of water catchment techniques or the provision of access to high-quality water), while four others addressed them partially or indirectly (e.g. by reducing poverty through increased income or increasing yields of targeted crops). The remaining 12 projects, while providing relevant support, primarily focused on meeting basic needs and mitigating the symptoms of food insecurity and malnutrition – such as poverty, low agricultural productivity or limited access to inputs – rather than tackling their underlying structural causes.
- 47** Humanitarian projects have greater flexibility compared to development projects, as they can utilise [crisis modifiers](#) (temporary financial or operational adjustments to projects due to exceptional crisis conditions) and emergency reserves to adapt to changing circumstances. While development projects can also include crisis modifiers, none of the projects we reviewed did so. Although some development projects had a contingency reserve (limited to maximum 5 % of the project budget), we consider that these reserves were generally insufficient to address significant unforeseen events effectively. For example, [project 1 in Ethiopia](#) used its entire contingency reserve in response to COVID-19, leaving it without any financial buffer against other unforeseen events for the remainder of its implementation. Moreover, in Zambia a more flexible project design, for example, could have been beneficial in the response to the 2024 droughts. This could have been achieved by [systematically incorporating crisis modifiers into development interventions](#) to ensure the availability of flexible funds to support partners in scaling up emergency responses in the event of shocks. We therefore consider that the design of current development projects lacks sufficient flexibility to respond effectively to unforeseen events such as droughts, floods or conflicts.

## The Commission's actions were valuable and coordinated satisfactorily, but lacked sufficient focus on impact and sustainability

**48** We assessed whether the Commission had implemented the actions effectively. For this section we examined whether:

- the Commission had coordinated its actions well, both internally and with other donors;
- the Commission had implemented and monitored the projects adequately; and
- the projects had achieved their expected results and impact.

## The Commission's coordination of its actions was satisfactory

### Humanitarian-development nexus

**49** The EU is committed to implementing [the humanitarian-development nexus approach](#), a strategy that connects emergency humanitarian aid with long-term development efforts to create sustainable solutions for crises. Instead of treating disasters and conflicts as isolated events, the EU aims to address both immediate needs (such as food) and underlying causes (like poverty or climate change). This approach is designed to help countries become more resilient and to reduce their dependence on repeated humanitarian aid. Its impact can include stronger institutions, improved livelihoods and better crisis prevention, ultimately fostering stability and self-reliance in affected regions.

**50** The Commission has established [a robust framework](#) for the humanitarian-development nexus, outlining key steps to put it into operation. However, implementation at country level varies significantly, and practical execution remains weak due to insufficient follow-through on the necessary steps. Most sub-Saharan countries lack joint context analysis, joint planning and action mapping. While resource-intensive and complex, these elements are essential for putting the humanitarian-development nexus into operation effectively.

**51** Only in three sub-Saharan countries (Chad, Ethiopia and Sudan) did the EU delegations carry out a joint context analysis. There is a joint action plan for Sudan and Ethiopia, while Chad is piloting joint actions in two provinces.

**52** In the sampled projects, we found that there was generally very little connection between humanitarian and development efforts. As a result, a nexus approach was not effectively

applied. A direct link between development and humanitarian efforts was present in only three of the sampled projects ([projects 3 and 6 in Kenya](#) and [project 2 in Ethiopia](#)).

- 53** Our desk review found that two countries had made significant progress in implementing the nexus approach. Chad, as a nexus pilot country, successfully put the nexus into operation in two pilot provinces, involving stakeholders beyond the EU. Before the coup in July 2023, Niger had made progress in strengthening national nexus capacities, including the establishment of a government-led nexus committee. By contrast, South Sudan had limited coordination structures while also facing a severe humanitarian crisis.
- 54** Several structural constraints make implementing the nexus challenging, such as differences between DG INTPA's and DG ECHO's programming cycles, mandates and approaches. Another key challenge, besides the limited funding available, is having sufficient human resources, as both the key steps and day-to-day coordination of food system interventions require continuous investment from Commission staff, without which they risk becoming unsustainable.

### Team Europe initiatives

- 55** A Team Europe initiative (TEI) is a collaborative framework that brings together the EU, its member states, their implementing agencies, and development finance institutions to address global challenges and achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs). TEIs aim to pool resources, expertise and capabilities to deliver large-scale, high-impact actions in partner countries, focusing on shared priorities.
- 56** Based on the [2022 Council conclusions on the Team Europe response to global food insecurity](#) we examined how well the Commission and EU member states planned and implemented food-related TEIs in sub-Saharan Africa. We found that food security, food systems and nutrition were not a major focus for TEIs. There was also no unified system for monitoring TEIs. Each country and EU delegations used its own methods, leading to inconsistent reporting and limited synergies. As a result, the TEI framework has so far remained a theoretical concept with limited practical impact on hunger relief.

### Coordination between the EU, national authorities and other donors

- 57** The Commission actively supports a wide range of global initiatives aimed at enhancing coordination and knowledge-sharing in the fight against hunger. Through financial contributions and expertise, the EU plays a key role in several major platforms, including [the Global Network Against Food Crises](#) and [the Committee on World Food Security](#). These platforms also produce high-quality data to guide informed decision-making. Other significant knowledge-building efforts include [the Commission's Knowledge Centre for](#)

[Global Food and Nutrition Security](#) and the [DeSIRA initiative](#), which advances SAAFS through science and research. In the field of nutrition, the Commission funds initiatives such as the [Global Nutrition Report](#), an accountability mechanism, and the [Scaling Up Nutrition platform](#).

- 58** Across all projects in our sample, regular coordination meetings were held involving EU delegations, national authorities and other donors. Moreover, the EU delegations ensured consistent engagement with implementing partners through both formal and informal meetings, though not all of those meetings were documented. There was also a clear division of responsibilities among the national authorities and donors.

## Monitoring of project implementation was mostly insufficient

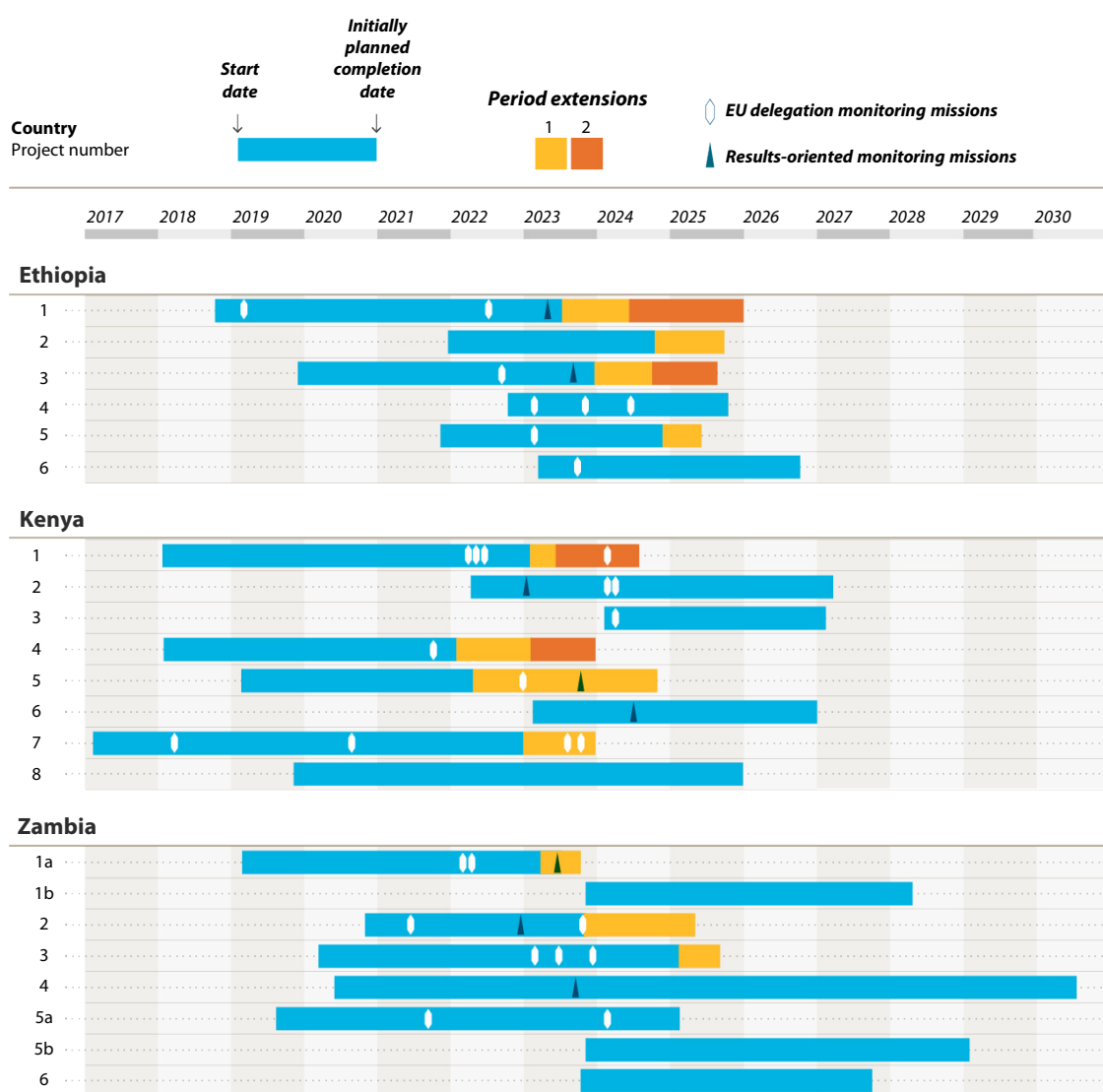
- 59** The monitoring process of EU-funded projects involves a combination of regular reporting, site visits, and implementing partners' consultations. Implementing partners are required to submit periodic progress reports detailing activities, outputs and expenditure, which are reviewed by the EU delegations. Independent evaluations or external financial verification audits may also be conducted to verify the accuracy of the information reported and assess project performance. The sections below present our assessment of the various components of the monitoring process.

### Project implementation and monitoring missions

- 60** About half of the projects in our sample encountered delays during their implementation (see [Figure 5](#)). According to our analysis, the most common reasons for delays were COVID-19, the implementing partner's low capacity, limited institutional capacities in partner institutions, procurement challenges, logistical constraints and changes in staff at government level. When delays occurred, the Commission rarely took corrective action to mitigate and address them, other than granting no-cost extensions (if applicable).
- 61** The EU delegations, the implementing partners and external audit firms undertook visits to monitor EU-funded projects. However, we consider that the EU delegations generally did not conduct enough monitoring visits, which limited their ability to verify the actual situation on the ground (see [Figure 5](#)). This limitation also affects their capacity to oversee project implementation effectively and to take timely corrective action when needed. However, we recognise that a combination of logistical, human resource and security constraints has increasingly limited the capacity of many EU delegations — particularly in fragile or remote areas — to conduct regular monitoring visits. Despite the low number of monitoring visits by the EU delegations, [results-oriented monitoring](#) was conducted for only about half of the sampled projects and there is little evidence that the resulting

recommendations were followed up. For two projects (project 4 in Ethiopia and project 3 in Kenya), a contract for monitoring by a third party was signed. Given the security constraints, this proved to be a good practice in Ethiopia as it resulted in the recovery of stolen food.

**Figure 5 | Project monitoring missions**



Source: ECA, based on Commission data.

- 62** The Commission did not conduct checks to verify the reasonableness of costs during project implementation. However, except for projects implemented by **pillar-assessed entities** (i.e. those which the Commission has assessed as protecting the EU's financial interests to the same level as under direct management), an external audit firm was engaged to perform financial expenditure verifications. Ineligible expenditure was identified by this firm for four projects but subsequently recovered for only one of them. At the time of the audit, ineligible expenditure totalling about €496 000 for the other three projects had not been recovered.



- 63** Our own audit identified additional cases of ineligible expenditure amounting to €673 000. These cases concerned [project 3 Ethiopia](#) and [project 1 Kenya](#). As of June 2025, the EU delegations had not recovered any of these ineligible costs.

### Logical frameworks

- 64** Projects results were measured against the targets set in planning documents known as “logical frameworks”, which formed part of the administrative agreement. However, indicators were mostly quantitative and measured outputs more often than outcomes.
- 65** We noted weaknesses in the logical frameworks of two thirds of the sampled projects. In addition, baselines had not been set for all indicators in half of the sampled projects before their implementation started. Therefore, those indicators are unable to measure the long-term impact of activities and cannot be assessed in terms of their achievability or relevance. For 10 projects, the indicators did not make it possible to measure the achievement of the specific and the overall objectives, as they were either not sufficiently granular or not directly linked to those objectives.

### Reporting framework

- 66** The Commission, as well as other development partners, report on [official development assistance](#) to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) using [Development Assistance Committee \(DAC\) codes](#). However, there is no internationally agreed methodology for measuring funding related to food security and no specific DAC codes exist for this purpose. Instead, the Commission has identified several DAC codes they consider relevant.
- 67** When projects have multiple objectives, they can be classified, counted and reported under various sectors. The lack of standardised definitions, coupled with differences between the definitions used by donors, leads to inconsistent estimates. This creates challenges in identifying underfunded areas, ensuring accountability and tracking the impact of interventions.
- 68** For the identification of nutrition-related actions, two methodologies are relevant. In the [2014–2020](#) period, the Commission categorised project spending as either 25 % or 100 % nutrition-related, depending on the size of the nutrition-related components within projects. Since 2021, the Commission has been following [OECD guidelines](#) on using a nutrition policy marker. These guidelines describe a method for considering only the nutrition-related share of each project, but their use is not obligatory. In line with the practice of other donors, the Commission has chosen to classify any project with a nutrition component as 100 % nutrition-related, regardless of the actual significance of

that component. This has led to the overstatement of nutrition-related spending for projects of which nutrition is only a minor component.

**69** The [Global Europe Results Framework](#) is the Commission’s framework for measuring the effectiveness and impact of the EU’s development cooperation. Its aim is to provide clear and measurable indicators to enhance the EU’s ability to demonstrate to stakeholders the tangible results of its funding. In relation to fighting hunger, four indicators are specifically relevant, i.e. those linked to SDG 2 “Zero Hunger” (see [Table 1](#)). However, the data from the framework stated in [the Commission’s annual activity report](#) on external action instruments does not reflect the results achieved and understates outputs and outcomes, as the framework’s indicators are not well integrated into projects. Moreover, the aggregated results reported do not include all countries. Eighteen of the 22 projects in our sample did not use these indicators despite their relevance.

**Table 1 | Global Europe Results Framework SDG 2 indicators**

Indicator	Description
2.1	Number of smallholders reached with EU-supported interventions aimed at increasing their sustainable production, access to markets and/or security of land
2.2	Areas of agricultural and pastoral ecosystems where sustainable management practices have been introduced with EU assistance (ha)
2.32	Number of food-insecure people receiving EU assistance
2.33	Number of women of reproductive age, adolescent girls and children under 5 reached by EU-supported nutrition-related interventions

### Reliability of project data

**70** In addition to conducting on-the-spot visits, the EU delegations reviewed projects’ progress reports. While the EU delegation frequently requested clarifications from implementing partners in Zambia, this was rarely the case in Ethiopia and Kenya. Moreover, none of the EU delegation project managers verified the underlying data of figures reported in the progress reports. As a result, the reliability of key figures – such as the number of jobs created for smallholder farmers or the number of beneficiaries reached – was not assessed by the Commission.

**71** During our on-the-spot visits, we discovered a few instances of discrepancies between the data in the progress reports and the actual situation on the ground. For instance, for [project 1 in Kenya](#), the final report lists a specific company as beneficiary. However, our findings indicated that the actual recipient of the support was another company. Additionally, for [project 6 in Kenya](#), the project’s progress report indicated that a planned sand dam was expected to serve 2 000 families under normal conditions and up to

7 000 families under peak drought conditions. However, our visit showed that 200 households benefitted directly from the project. This differed from the figure stated in the progress report.

## Visibility

- 72** All recipients of EU funding have a general obligation to acknowledge the origin and ensure the visibility of any EU funding received. For all projects examined, [visibility guidelines](#) were contractually agreed. During project implementation, implementing partners sent the EU delegations a communication and visibility plan. These plans identified target groups as well as communication activities for each target group, including websites, photos, videos, press articles, promotional items, signage and opening and closing events. However, during our on-the-spot visits, we noted that visibility rules were not followed fully in several instances. EU visibility was good in nine cases but limited in seven, and in five cases there was none at all. One project had just started, so it was too soon to assess its EU visibility.

## The Commission's actions, while valuable, have had mixed results overall

### Delivery of project outputs and results

- 73** The EU's interventions in sub-Saharan Africa have achieved mixed results overall. Several projects succeeded in increasing the quality and quantity of the farmers' harvests and the number of smallholder farmers in jobs, or in providing a better understanding of the countries' geological or land management situation. However, despite addressing basic needs, they failed to address critical linkages to markets, including those for farmers to sell their harvests, access financial services or obtain inputs such as seeds and machinery. This shortcoming has limited beneficiaries' ability to fully capitalise on their projects' potential to reduce poverty and inequality. The lack of connections to these essential markets significantly compromises the projects' sustainability.
- 74** We assessed whether the planned outputs and results had been achieved and whether the Commission had ensured their sustainability. [Annex III](#) sets out our assessment of the projects in terms of needs addressed, timeliness, cost-effectiveness, monitoring, results and sustainability. Overall, the planned outputs were delivered but the impact of projects is not measured sufficiently. A causal link generally existed between project activities and results achieved.

## Impact on target groups

- 75** Our on-the-spot visits confirmed that the projects had delivered positive benefits for beneficiaries – see [Box 3](#) for some examples. However, it is not possible to fully demonstrate whether the projects have had a direct impact on beneficiaries' food security, as the projects' outcomes are not measured consistently or accurately. A robust evidence base to measure increased nutrient intake or improved yields of smallholder farmers was lacking, except in the case of [project 5 in Kenya](#). One of the project's targets was to increase farmers' yields by 1.5 % across 11 value chains. The implementing partner monitored this outcome indicator and disclosed the results in the project's progress report. However, by the end of the project, only four of the 11 value chains had met the target, while yields in the remaining seven value chains had decreased compared to the baseline.

### Box 3

#### Benefits of projects for beneficiaries

##### Project 6 – Ethiopia

The project seeks to reduce food insecurity in Ethiopia by focusing on resilient agricultural activities and enhancing productivity through sustainable development of the seed sector. The intervention had benefits in terms of food security for farmers in the target areas. Additionally, the support provided for beekeeping has proven to be highly effective as well as sustainable.

However, some issues reduced the project's effectiveness. In particular, the quantity of seed provided per beneficiary was not sufficient to plant the intended 0.25 hectares of land. Furthermore, for one region (Tigray), the feasibility study was completed only after the first distribution of seeds had been carried out, raising questions about whether the initial distribution was aligned with the region's specific needs and agricultural conditions. Moreover, distributing hybrid seed types poses limitations as their yield decreases over time and farmers lack the means to purchase new seeds.

##### Project 6 – Kenya

The project's aim was to increase resilience to drought and the effects of climate change in ASALs. The project tangibly benefitted the lives of the beneficiaries, as one of the key contributing factors was the implementing partner's involvement of local government and relevant sector authorities. Community ownership was also a critical factor, both financially and in terms of mobilising community members.

For example, thanks to one of the activities supported by the project (the Mwanja sand dam), people who previously had to walk several times a day to fetch water from a salty and dirty river now have access to clean drinking water, either at their own homes or at nearby community service stations. This improvement has allowed beneficiaries to dedicate more time to agriculture, leading to better-quality harvests and increased crop volumes. In addition, cattle now have access to water and conditions in schools, churches and markets in the village have improved significantly. The project includes plans to install meters to monitor water usage, and to charge users for the water they consume. This approach ensures the project's sustainability by generating revenue for maintenance and encouraging responsible water use.

**Picture 1** illustrates a beneficiary who was provided with access to water at her house for the first time.

### **Picture 1 | Water access at beneficiaries' homes**



Source: ECA.

Another project activity provided female goats to the most vulnerable individuals in a village. The goats were of a climate-resilient breed, specifically chosen to prevent hybrid offspring and impregnated by a male goat of the same breed. When the goats reproduced, the offsprings were distributed to other villagers, thereby ensuring the benefits of the initiative were shared widely as well as ensuring sustainability. Beneficiaries could use the goats' milk to feed their children or sell it for additional income. With an average lifespan of 4 years, the goats could also be sold for meat, offering an additional source of income for the families involved. See **Picture 2** showing a beneficiary of the project.

**Picture 2 | Goat owner in front of goat-breeding shelter**



Source: ECA.

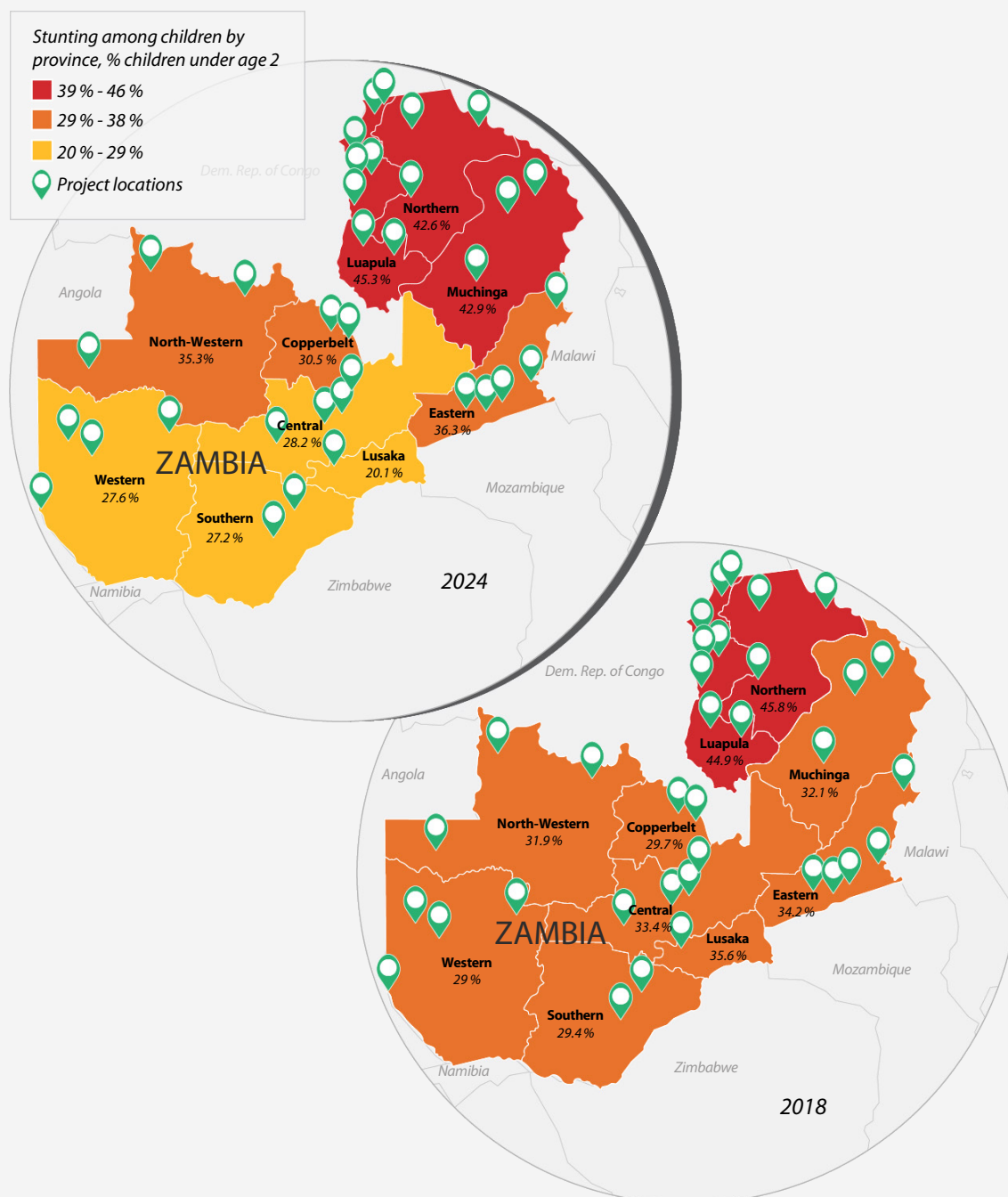
### Project 2 – Zambia

The project focused on combating malnutrition by bringing together government, civil society and donors to improve nutrition outcomes. It focused on policy advocacy, capacity building and resource mobilisation. The project is aligned with the government's [First 1 000 Days](#) programme and complements the national programme in targeting malnutrition.

The project had a positive impact in reducing levels of stunting in various districts (see [Figure 6](#)). However, its long-term impact is unlikely to be sustainable, as the project did not address the root causes of malnutrition.



**Figure 6 | Project's impact on stunting in Zambia**



Source: ECA, based on Commission data and [Zambia Demographic and Health Surveys 2018 and 2024](#).  
Map source: Olli.

## Sustainability

**76** The projects' activities contributed to sustainable solutions in some cases, but most projects were likely to be unsustainable due to lack of future funding. We found that all but three of the projects in our sample lacked an exit strategy and that such strategies were not always implemented effectively in practice even when they existed.

- 77** We also found that most projects focused primarily on value chain development. Although in line with priorities of the Global Gateway initiative, this results in insufficient attention being given to health and dietary diversification. Malnutrition remains high in both rural and urban areas, with little understanding of food quality or diversification among the local population. Projects focused predominantly on increasing food quantity, with an emphasis on staple foods rather than a balanced, varied diet.
- 78** Moreover, the projects consistently targeted a small number of individuals relative to the overall population in need. Replication of these initiatives is essential but is hindered by a lack of funding from both the government and donors.
- 79** For most projects, beneficiaries were still using the equipment provided. We did note some exceptions in four projects, however (see [Box 4](#)). EU grant contracts stipulate that, when projects end, equipment such as motorbikes, cars and laptops are to be handed over to local partners, such as government ministries. This contractual clause risks creating the expectation, among these partners, of receiving new equipment under future projects, thereby reducing their motivation to properly maintain the vehicles and equipment received and the already limited resources they devote to doing so. Additionally, there was no follow-up to monitor how these assets were being used or maintained once the projects had ended, or whether they were still being used for their intended purposes under the projects.

#### Box 4

##### Ineffective use of project equipment

- Project 4 in Kenya: we visited the computer room of the Waruhiu agricultural training centre and inspected some of the equipment provided through the project, which included 13 computers. Many of the computers had no internet connection and did not work.
- Project 1 in Zambia: the project sites received water tanks, irrigation pipes and solar pumps. Although the local community used this infrastructure, they unfortunately did not have the money to maintain them.
- Project 1 in Ethiopia: we found that a motorbike purchased under the project had not been used since the project started (even though the beneficiaries had requested more of them) and a purchased truck had tyres that were so worn that it could no longer be driven safely ([Picture 3](#)).

- Project 5 in Ethiopia: some items procured had not been used, even though the project was ending soon. The items concerned were two flat-screen TVs, a desktop computer and a small generator ([Picture 4](#)). Under the same project, a school received a water tank despite already having one. Moreover, the local population did not have the money to fill the tank with water.

**Picture 3 | Equipment not used/usable**



Source: ECA.

**Picture 4 | Equipment not used**



Source: ECA.

## 80 The main factors contributing to the lack of sustainability include:

- EU-supported structures not being adequately linked with existing government structures;
- lack of government capacity and funding for nutrition and food security;
- high dependence on donor funding;

- o some projects having been designed and implemented without considering local capacity and maintenance costs; and
- o lack of connection between smallholder farmers and the private or financial sectors.

**81** Various projects aimed to increase both the quality and quantity of farmers' harvests, but these often lacked any connection to export markets or to financing. It is very difficult for farmers to secure loans (even with more favourable conditions, such as under project 8 in Kenya and project 4 in Zambia) and make further investments to sustain their increased harvests.

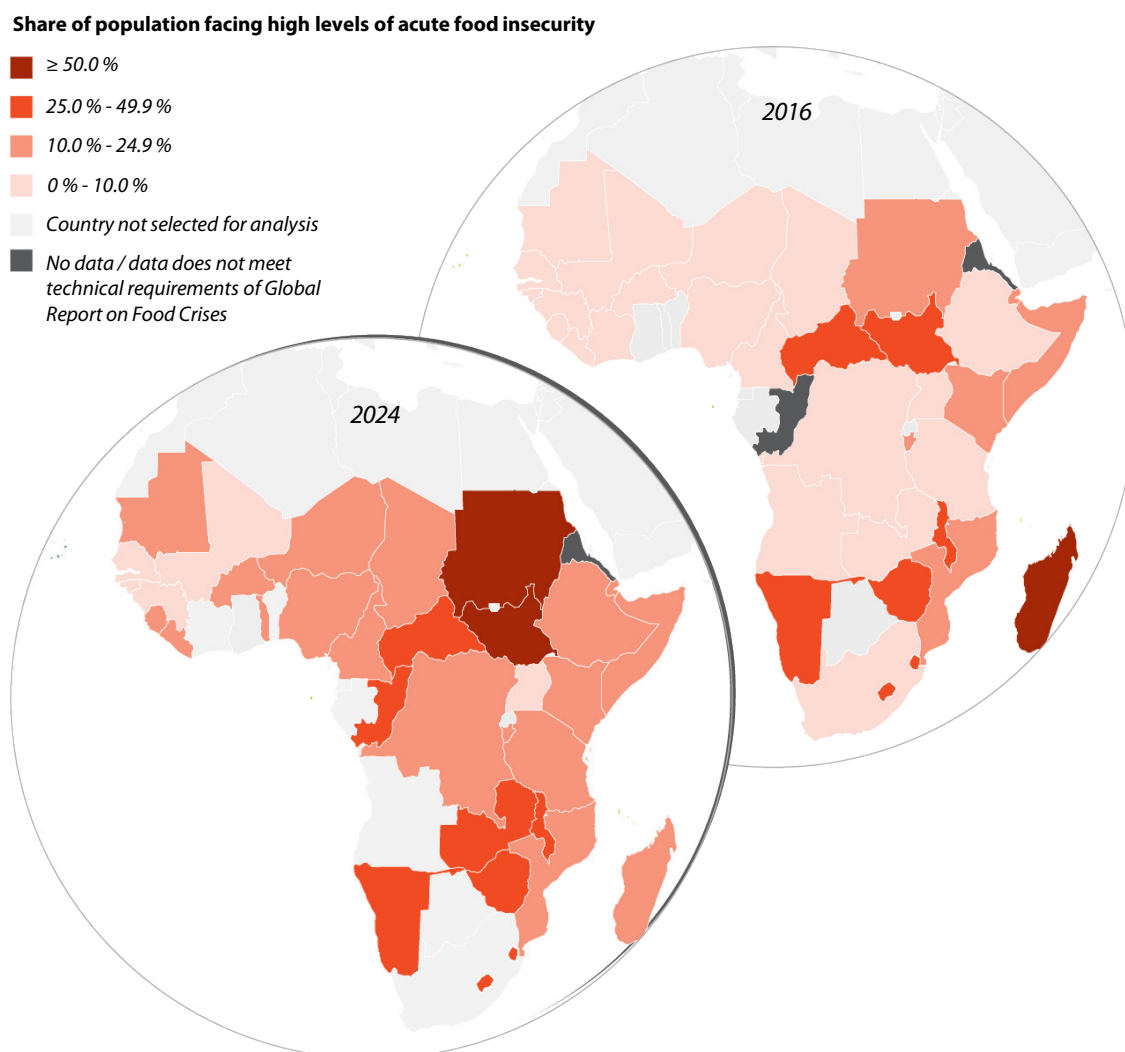
**82** The projects that proved to be sustainable were those in which beneficiaries contributed financially and assumed both operational and financial risks. By contrast, projects that focus on supplying seeds to farmers, food to schools or nutritional supplements to hospitals for undernourished children are, by their very nature, not sustainable in the long term without continued donor or government support, even if this support has an immediate, short-term positive impact.

**83** For the projects in our sample, there has been very limited follow-up by the EU delegations after completion to assess the situation of final beneficiaries, such as improvements in malnutrition or food-insecurity levels or increases in harvests (and hence income).

### **Food insecurity and malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa**

**84** For most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the situation has not significantly improved over time, with persistent challenges in addressing food insecurity, malnutrition and other underlying issues (see [Figure 7](#) and [Figure 8](#)). While stunting has decreased in prevalence relative to the overall population of sub-Saharan Africa, in absolute terms the number of stunted children in the region is increasing (see [Figure 9](#)). Despite various efforts and interventions, the region continues to face significant obstacles, including climate change, conflict and economic instability, which have hindered progress. At the current rate of progress, by 2030 millions of people will still be undernourished, millions of children will still be affected by malnutrition in its different forms, and the goal of “zero hunger” (SDG 2) will remain a long way off being achieved.

**Figure 7 | Food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa**



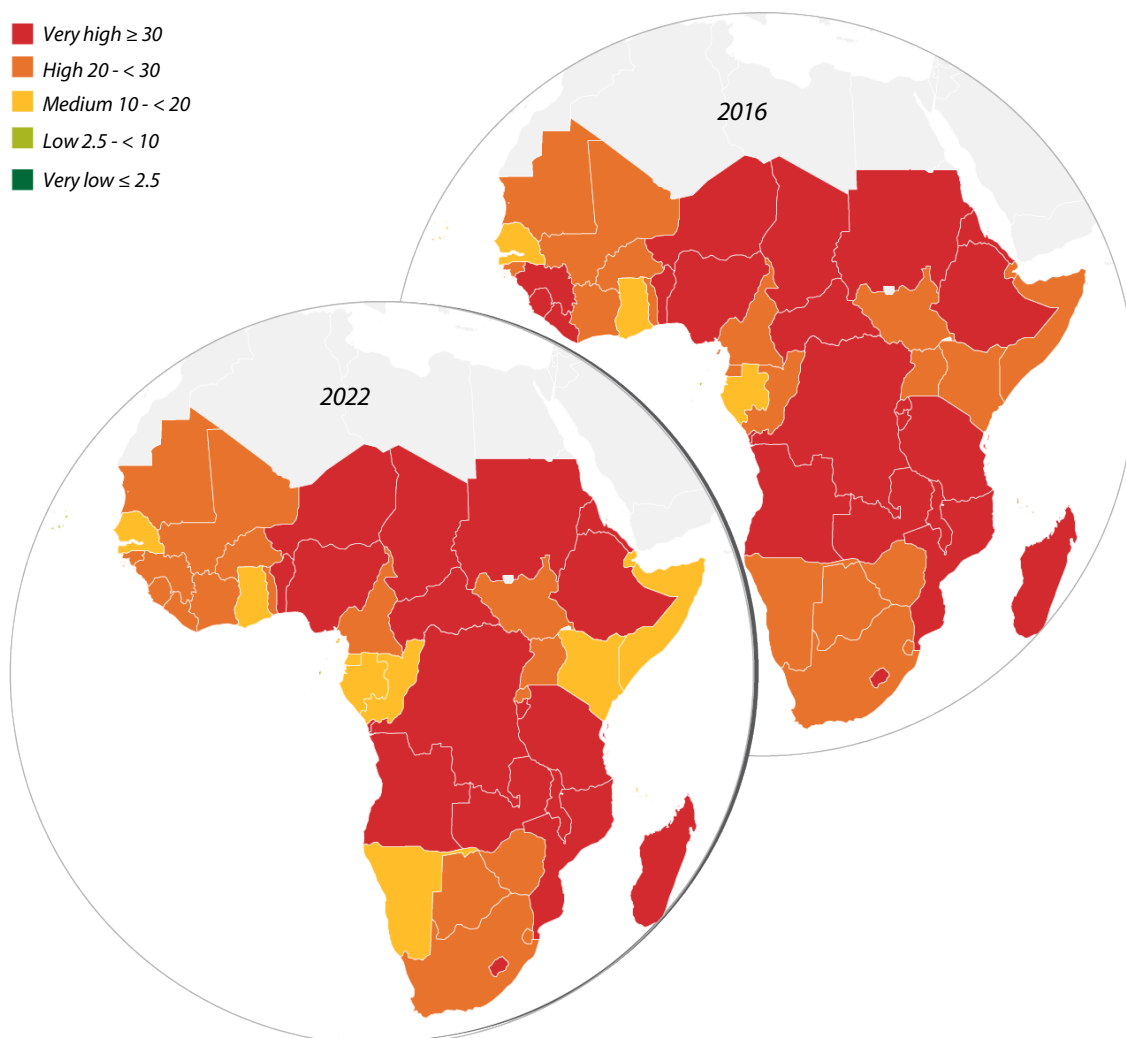
Source: ECA, based on [Global Report on Food Crises](#).

Map source: Eurostat.

**Figure 8 | Malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa**

**Stunting prevalence among children under 5 years of age (%)**

- Very high  $\geq 30$
- High 20 - < 30
- Medium 10 - < 20
- Low 2.5 - < 10
- Very low  $\leq 2.5$

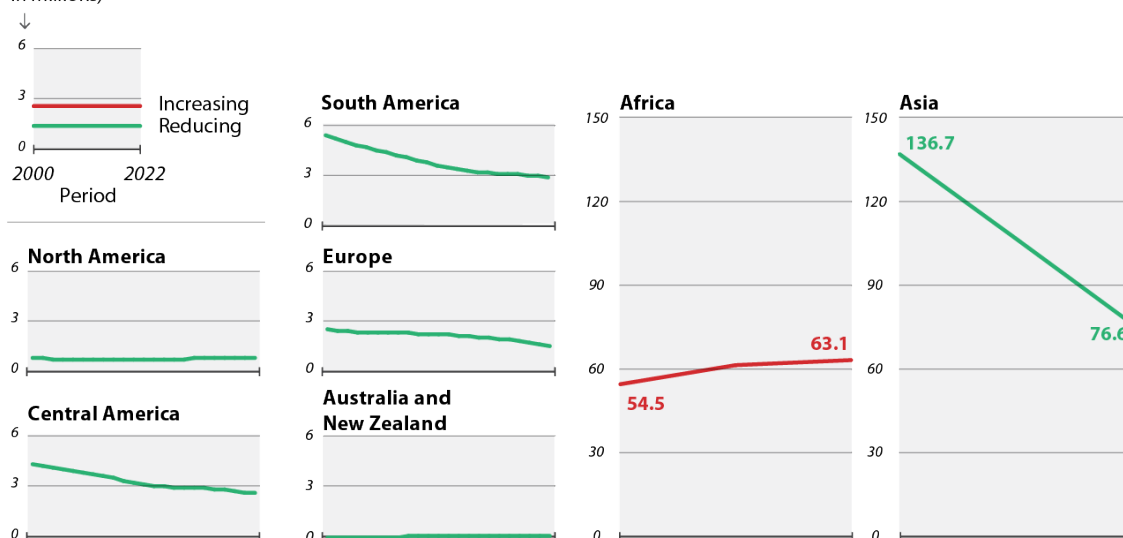


Source: ECA, based on [World Health Organisation](#) data.

Map source: Eurostat.

**Figure 9 | Trend analysis stunted children in sub-Saharan Africa**

(stunted children,  
in millions)



Source: ECA, based on [World Health Organisation](#) data.

- 85** In the countries we visited, levels of child malnutrition remain very high despite improvements in recent years. Moreover, the prevalence of severe food insecurity has been increasing, despite funding from the EU and other donors.

This report was adopted by Chamber III, headed by Mrs Bettina Jakobsen, Member of the Court of Auditors, in Luxembourg at its meeting of 23 September 2025.

*For the Court of Auditors*

Tony Murphy  
President



# Annexes

## Annex I – About the audit

### Fighting hunger: context and components

- 01** Conflicts, economic shocks and weather extremes continue to be drivers of significant food insecurity around the world. In 2024, 295 million people in 53 countries faced high levels of acute food insecurity, with 13.7 million more people needing urgent assistance than in 2023. Acute malnutrition of women and children continued to deteriorate as well, leaving over 37.7 million children under 5 years old acutely malnourished.
- 02** The main drivers of food insecurity are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine have been large shocks affecting a wide range of countries, and the conflicts in Palestine and Sudan are creating extreme humanitarian crises. Countries with structural vulnerabilities have difficulties responding to and recovering from shocks, especially frequently recurring ones, and the high number of displaced people brings additional pressure.
- 03** Fighting hunger includes a range of activities related to food assistance, nutrition, food security and food systems (see [Figure 1](#)). These are interlinked, targeting those facing or at risk of food insecurity, and require an understanding of long-term needs.
- 04** In the EU, funding to fight hunger is provided through humanitarian assistance, which is under the responsibility of the Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), and through development cooperation, which is a responsibility of the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA). While DG ECHO provides humanitarian assistance and DG INTPA focuses on creating sustainable change by addressing the underlying causes of humanitarian crises, both types of funding can be provided to the same geographical area at the same time. Addressing the root causes of crises while simultaneously meeting humanitarian needs requires actions to ensure complementarity. The [humanitarian-development nexus approach](#) looks for synergies and consistency between the two forms of assistance to respond better to crises and build resilience.

## The global and EU policy frameworks

- 05** Fighting hunger forms part of various policies and frameworks, at both EU and global level. See [Figure 1 – Annex I](#) for a graphical overview.

**Figure 1 | Policy framework for fighting hunger**

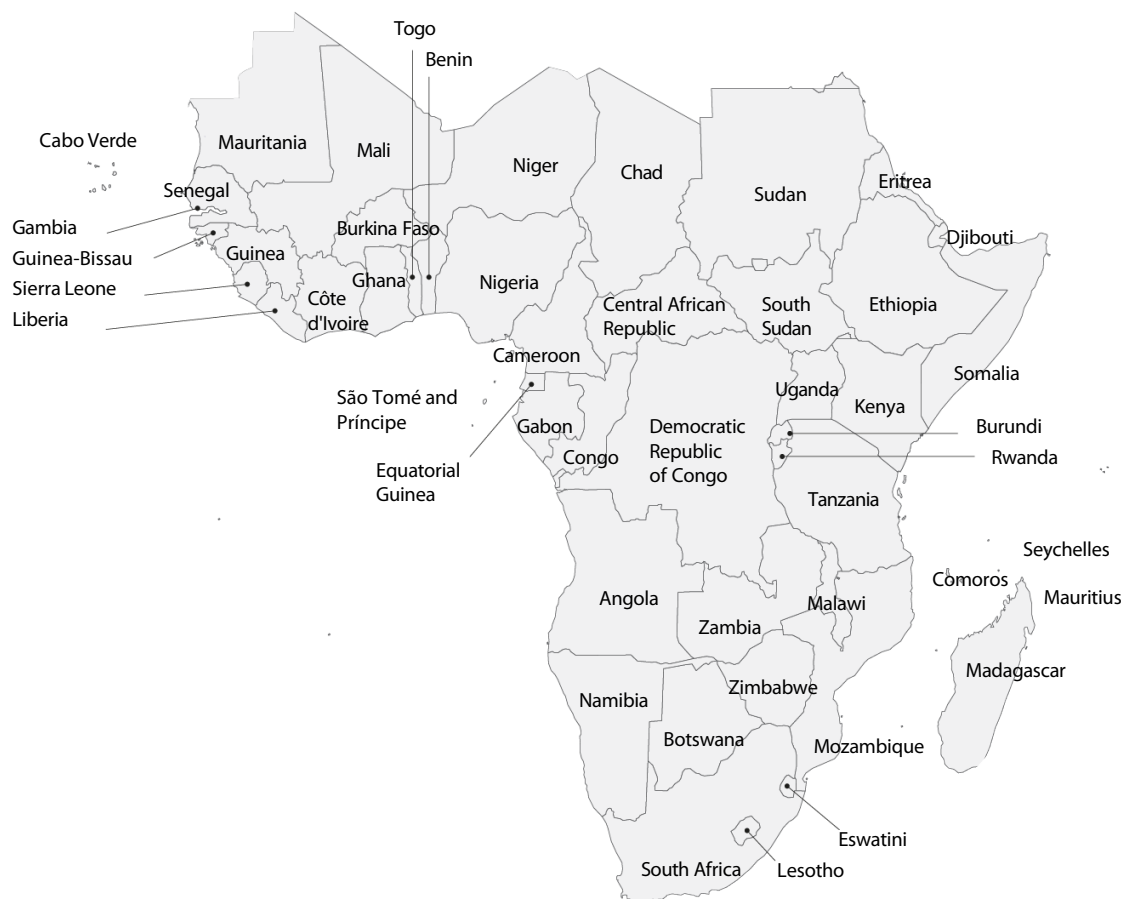


Source: ECA.

## Allocation of funding

- 06** The Commission reports to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on the annual funding relevant for each UN SDG. Of the €3.5 billion in contracts that DG INTPA and DG ECHO report having concluded to address [SDG 2](#) in 2021–2024, 56 % was managed by DG INTPA and 44 % by DG ECHO. The financing instruments used by DG INTPA are the [Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe](#) (NDICI – Global Europe), under the current multiannual financial framework, and the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) under the 2014–2020 multiannual financial framework, as well as the 10th and 11th European Development Funds (EDFs). The instrument used by DG ECHO is the Humanitarian Aid Programme. Of the total funding reported for SDG 2 “Zero Hunger”, 58 % (€1.9 billion) has been allocated to sub-Saharan Africa (see [Figure 2](#)). In this region, DG INTPA managed 63 % of funding and DG ECHO 37 % in 2021–2024. The main implementing partners in sub-Saharan Africa are United Nations organisations and member state development agencies, which together account for over 40 % of funding. The remainder is implemented by private companies, non-governmental organisations, national partner countries’ governments or financial institutions.

Figure 2 | Sub-Saharan Africa



Source: ECA.

Map source: Eurostat.

## Audit scope and approach

**07** We examined whether the Commission is targeting and implementing its development actions to fight hunger in sub-Saharan Africa effectively. More specifically, we assessed whether:

- the Commission's development actions to fight hunger addressed the most relevant needs and priorities; and
- the Commission had implemented those actions effectively.

- 
- 08** The audit covered those projects from the 2014–2020 period that were ending between 2021 and 2024. This allowed us to evaluate their full implementation and the results achieved. In addition, we covered those projects that had already been started in the 2021–2027 period, covering both their design and implementation to date. Therefore, our audit included projects funded by the NDICI – Global Europe, the EDFs and the DCI.
- 09** The geographical scope of the audit was sub-Saharan Africa, where hunger continues to be very prevalent and the EU has provided a material level of funding (€23.2 billion in contracts concluded between 2014 and 2024 for activities related to sustainable aquatic and agricultural food systems (SAAFS) and humanitarian aid) to fight hunger. Moreover, over the last decade, significant progress has been made in reducing malnutrition and food insecurity across most continents. However, sub-Saharan Africa remains a notable exception. Despite efforts to address hunger and malnutrition, the region continues to face persistent challenges.
- 10** The audit focused on development cooperation actions addressing food security, sustainable aquatic and agri-food systems, and nutrition. These are long-term measures and are managed by DG INTPA. Although the emergency relief food assistance provided by DG ECHO did not fall directly within our audit scope, we examined how the humanitarian-development nexus had been put into operation, as well as coordination between DG INTPA and DG ECHO.
- 11** The audit was carried out by means of on-the-spot audit visits to Ethiopia, Kenya and Zambia, desk reviews for Chad, Niger and South Sudan, interviews with relevant stakeholders and analysis of documents for all countries in sub-Saharan Africa.
- 12** The countries audited on the spot and by desk review were selected using several criteria, such as materiality, range of projects and levels of malnutrition. For the three countries visited we analysed a sample of 22 projects out of a population of 91, representing 51 % of the total financial value. For the countries assessed by desk review, we analysed a sample of 16 projects out of a population of 103. For these countries, our review focused on the implementation of the nexus. The selection of projects for on-the-spot visits was based on materiality, project status (to obtain a mix of ongoing and completed projects), the management mode applied (to obtain a mix of projects under direct or indirect management), the instrument from which they were funded (to obtain a mix of projects funded from the DCI, the EDFs or the NDICI – Global Europe), the type of support provided (to obtain a mix of food security, nutrition and food systems projects as well as a mix of funding arrangements such as budget support and project-based interventions) and the multiannual financial framework period in which they were implemented (to obtain a mix of projects funded in 2014–2020 and 2021–2024).

## Annex II – Sampled projects

Country	Project number	Type of implementing partner	Project description	Start date	End date	Committed (EUR)	Disbursed (EUR)
Ethiopia	1	National government agency	EU coffee action for Ethiopia (EU-Cafe)	8.11.2018	31.12.2025	10 486 000	3 821 897
	2	International organisation	Support for effective food security, nutrition and resilience programming in Ethiopia	1.12.2021	30.9.2025	3 300 000	2 040 769
	3	National government agency	PROSEAD component 3: Value chain development for integrated agro-industrial parks (IAIPS) sustained growth (support for agriculture value chain)	3.12.2019	2.8.2025	10 000 000	8 435 836
	4	International organisation	Restoring essential education services to conflict affected children in Ethiopia – school feeding	21.11.2022	20.11.2025	6 200 000	4 173 425
	5	National government agency	Addressing social determinants of health (SDH) for gender equality in Afar regional state, Ethiopia	18.11.2021	17.5.2025	4 812 500	4 331 250
	6	Member state development agency	FARM-ETHIOPIA: Food security and agriculture rehabilitation measures in conflict- and drought-affected regions of Ethiopia	10.2.2023	9.11.2026	14 000 000	12 596 485
Kenya	1	National government agency	Kenyan initiative for long-term integration of market operators in value chains	1.1.2018	1.7.2024	21 992 033	19 792 830
	2	International organisation	Digital land governance programme (DLGP)	1.4.2022	29.3.2027	20 000 000	14 633 064
	3	International organisation	Flexible mechanism for migration and forced displacement in sub-Saharan Africa, building refugee settlements in Kenya	1.1.2024	1.1.2027	14 000 000	7 467 646
	4	Member state development agency	Support for productive, adapted and market integrated smallholder agriculture	1.1.2018	31.12.2023	7 000 000	7 000 000
	5	National government agency	Climate smart agricultural productivity project (CS APP)	4.1.2019	30.11.2024	5 000 000	4 500 000
	6	National government agency	Dryland climate action for community drought resilience (DCADR)	1.1.2023	31.12.2026	13 000 000	4 201 737
	7	National government agency	Strengthening the Kenyan National Food Fortification Programme to improve the health and nutritional status of poor and vulnerable groups	1.1.2017	31.12.2023	3 200 000	2 751 429
	8	International financial organisation	Grant for Kenya Agriculture Value Chain Facility financed from the European Development Fund under the Africa Investment Facility	6.11.2019	31.12.2025	10 000 000	9 921 271
Zambia	1a	Member state development agency	Enhanced sustainable and gender-sensitive agricultural water management and irrigation systems for smallholder farmers in selected districts of the Lower Kafue sub-catchment	1.2.2019	30.9.2023	13 500 000	13 500 000
	1b	Member state development agency	Integrated water catchment management and landscape protection in Zambia	1.11.2023	30.4.2028	8 000 000	1 200 000
	2	International organisation	Scaling up nutrition phase II (SUN phase II)	1.10.2020	30.4.2025	18 028 750	17 917 247
	3	International non-governmental organisation	Economic, nutrition and technical support for increased economic returns and profit in sustainable agribusiness in Zambia (ENTERPRISE)	1.3.2020	31.8.2025	25 998 382	19 598 951
	4	International financial organisation	Smallholder participation in value chains – blending – technical assistance and financial instrument support for Zambia Agriculture Value Chain Facility	20.6.2020	19.6.2030	14 999 370	1 508 995
	5a	International organisation	Sustainable intensification of smallholder farming systems in Zambia (SIFAZ)	1.8.2019	31.1.2025	12 000 000	12 000 000
	5b	International organisation	Sustainable intensification of smallholder farming systems in Zambia (SIFAZ) – Addendum 1	13.11.2025	31.1.2029	20 000 000	0
	6	Member state development agency	Sustainable landscape through integrated management (SLIM)	1.10.2023	30.09.2027	6 000 000	1 175 151

Source: ECA, based on Commission data.



## Abbreviations

ASALs	Arid and semi-arid lands
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
EDF	European Development Fund
MIP	Multiannual indicative programme
NDICI – Global Europe	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SAAFS	Sustainable aquatic and agricultural food systems
SDG	Sustainable development goal
TEI	Team Europe initiative



# Glossary

Direct management	Management of an EU fund or programme by the Commission alone, as opposed to shared management or indirect management.
Development cooperation	Policy of working in partnership with developing countries to promote sustainable development, reduce poverty and strengthen institutions through financial aid, technical assistance and policy support.
Food assistance	Aid provided in anticipation of, during or after a humanitarian crisis, comprising either food supplies or cash to buy food.
Food security	Situation in which everyone has stable access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food.
Global Gateway	EU strategy to forge links worldwide by investing in digital, energy and transport infrastructure and strengthening health, education and research systems.
Humanitarian aid	Assistance provided to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and after emergencies, including food, shelter, water, healthcare and protection services.
Impact	Wider long-term consequences of a completed project or programme, such as socio-economic benefits for the population as a whole.
Indirect management	Method of implementing the EU budget whereby the Commission entrusts implementation tasks to other entities (such as non-governmental and international organisations).
Logical framework	Detailed planning tool covering the implementation, management, monitoring and evaluation of a project. Also known as a <b>logframe</b> .
Nutrition	Intake, absorption and utilisation of nutrients from food.
Sustainable development goals	Seventeen goals set in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to stimulate action by all countries in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet. Also known as <b>official development goals</b> .
Outcome	Immediate or long-term change brought about by a project and which normally relate to its objectives, such as the benefits resulting from better agricultural practices.
Output	Something produced or achieved by a project, such as delivery of a training course or construction of a road.
Stunting	Impaired growth and development in children due to chronic malnutrition, leading to low height-for-age and long-term health and cognitive effects.
Wasting	Form of acute malnutrition characterised by low weight-for-height, resulting from rapid weight loss or failure to gain weight, often due to inadequate diet or disease.

## Replies of the Commission

<https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications/sr-2025-20>

## Timeline

<https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications/sr-2025-20>

## Audit team

The ECA's special reports set out the results of its audits of EU policies and programmes, or of management-related topics from specific budgetary areas. The ECA selects and designs these audit tasks to be of maximum impact by considering the risks to performance or compliance, the level of income or spending involved, forthcoming developments and political and public interest.

This performance audit was carried out by Audit Chamber III – External action, security and justice, headed by ECA Member Bettina Jakobsen. The audit was led by ECA Member Bettina Jakobsen, supported by Katja Mattfolk, Head of Private Office, and Paolo Rexha, Private Office Attaché; Pietro Puricella, Principal Manager; Kim Hublé, Head of Task; Aino Rantanen, Aurélia Petliza and Edwin van Veen, Auditors. Michael Pyper provided linguistic support. Alexandra Damir-Binzaru provided graphical support.



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## HOW TO CITE

European Court of Auditors, [special report 20/2025](#): “Commission support to fight hunger in sub-Saharan Africa – Commendable but insufficient focus on sustainability and impact”, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025.

We assessed the Commission's development efforts to combat food insecurity and malnutrition in sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, the Commission has made valuable efforts, but its actions have not always targeted those with the greatest needs and lack sufficient impact and sustainability. The absence of clear criteria for prioritising regions or target groups, coupled with needs exceeding available funds, has constrained the overall impact of interventions. Although coordination has been satisfactory, weaknesses in project design, monitoring, and challenges in addressing root causes of food insecurity have negatively affected the expected sustainability and impact. While EU actions have been aligned with partner countries' policies, and the Commission's actions have contributed to progress, significant challenges persist in reducing malnutrition and food insecurity. We put forward recommendations for future action.

*ECA special report pursuant to Article 287(4), second subparagraph, TFEU.*



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