



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

PORTUGAL HARMONISES DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES THROUGH AN EU PRESIDENCY

Key messages

Portugal's successful approach to its 2021 EU Presidency helped forge common positions on challenging topics, such as partnerships with middle-income countries and advancing human development. Setting clear priorities, its political awareness and flexibility, and its reputation as an honest broker helped Portugal reconcile diverging interests among Member States.

Keywords

[Multilateral institutions](#) | [Partnerships](#) | [Policy and guidance](#)

Key partner

[Portugal](#)

Challenge

Together, the European Union (EU) and its Member States are the world's largest providers of official development assistance (ODA). Holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU is an opportunity for a Member State to foster joint understanding and support a harmonised EU approach to key issues for development co-operation. However, forging consensus across the EU's diverse membership is often challenging and requires very significant efforts, complicated further by the short time span of the presidency (six months).

Approach

Portugal's approach to its EU Presidency in 2021 combined several measures:

- **Close engagement** with the previous and subsequent EU presidency holders (the so-called Trio), to ensure continuity.
- **Strong outreach** to all EU Member States to listen to and understand interests and positions, paired with a high level of transparency, reliability and a demonstrated willingness to be inclusive.
- **Clear priorities** for the development stream. These combined the interests of many member states, current dynamics and trends (e.g. COVID-19), as well as Portugal's own experience and interests.

- **Very experienced staff** leading on the presidency with expertise in both development and EU processes.
- **Partnerships with other institutions**, for instance with the think tank ECDPM (European Centre for Development Policy Management) for technical analysis of political issues, with the Portuguese Development NGO platform for contributions to political debate, and with the European Investment Bank for investment in Africa.

Results

Portugal was able to advance EU dialogue and secure joint positions through Council conclusions on a number of challenging issues:

- **Defining EU partnerships with middle-income countries (MICs)**: previously there had been no agreement as to how and to what extent MICs should be part of EU co-operation. The conclusions make a case for a differentiated approach, highlighting how partnerships with MICs on issues such as inequality, trade and global public goods can support global development, using different policy and co-operation tools.
- **Putting human development back on the EU agenda and adopting Team Europe's approach to human development**: Portugal's Presidency built on renewed impetus from the COVID-19 pandemic. With a view to informing new EU programming, the Council conclusions underscore the need to invest in human development, also highlighting its political relevance and its linkages to other priorities.
- **Increasing inclusiveness in the European development finance architecture**: Portugal's approach reinforced the understanding that all EU Member States, including those with smaller development co-operation systems, have strengths and expertise they can and should contribute to joint EU efforts.
- **Promoting humanitarian action and principles within a nexus approach**: the Council conclusions underline the need for a co-ordinated crisis response by the various actors, while fully respecting humanitarian principles in the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Lessons learnt

- **Develop a reputation as an honest broker**. Portugal was able to illustrate how the presidency's priorities were of high relevance for the EU as a collective, rather than being perceived as pursuing its own agenda. Thanks also to its experience as a traditional but small development co-operation partner, it was able to act as an effective broker and consensus builder between Member States - those with established and those with more recent development co-operation programmes.
- **Ensure political awareness and flexibility**. Portugal was able to seize opportunities and react quickly to emerging issues and the dynamic of the pandemic response. It built on its very significant EU engagement in the years leading up to the presidency.
- **Create partnerships and engage stakeholders**. Partnerships with civil society, think tanks and research institutions can help inform political debate, both in individual Member States and at international level with their development co-operation partners. Such engagement with stakeholders could also be interesting for future development diplomacy efforts.

Further information

Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, <https://www.2021portugal.eu/en>.

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ECDPM (2021), *Reinvigorating human development in EU external action*, <https://ecdpm.org/publications/reinvigorating-human-development-eu-external-action>.

OECD resources

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OECD, *Transition Finance Toolkit*, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/transition-finance-toolkit>.

To learn more about Portugal's development co-operation see:

OECD (2021), "Portugal", in *Development Co-operation Profiles*, <https://doi.org/10.1787/12c61cf7-en>.

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