

How the closure of USAID will affect the allocation of global official development assistance

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One of the first executive orders signed by President Trump in his second term suspended the operations of the US Agency for International Development, USAID, for 90 days. On 23 February 2025, the US government placed almost all USAID staff on administrative leave, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who was appointed administrator of the agency on 3 February, announced on 10 March that 83% of the programmes managed by the Agency would be scrapped and the vast majority of staff would be laid off.

The remaining programmes will be managed directly by the State Department. . . . / . . .

.../... On 22 April, President Trump announced the closure of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), another federal agency in charge of managing a fund for growth and poverty reduction in emerging and developing countries, the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA). Finally, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced the official end of USAID on 1 July.

These decisions, if they are approved by Congress and if they are not overturned by the courts, will put an end to an independent agency (USAID) created in 1961 by President Kennedy in the context of the Cold War to bolster American soft power, and to an equally independent agency (MCC) created in 2004 by President Bush in a context of growing rivalry with China in emerging and developing countries. Since its creation, USAID has intervened in almost all emerging and developing countries, including Russia (until 2012). Funded by federal government budget appropriations, USAID has worked exclusively in the form of grants. Annual commitment authorizations have exceeded USD 23 billion on average since the turn of the century, and USD 44 billion for the 2024/25 budget year (Source: USAID). Also financed by US government budget appropriations to the tune of USD 937 million for the 2025 budget year, down sharply on the previous year (USD 1.1 billion), and operating exclusively through grants, the MCC has intervened in 51 countries since its creation, the number of countries eligible on the basis of criteria that it itself determines, being limited (just over twenty in 2025). At the beginning of 2025, it had operations underway or signed in 20 countries, mainly in Sub-Saharan Africa and mostly dedicated to financing infrastructure (Source: MCC).

At a time when the international community has met in Seville at the beginning of July to discuss the delicate issue of financing development, particularly in poor and vulnerable countries, the US announcements have made the equation even more complex. The Center for Global Development (CGDEV) estimates that between 24% and 53% of USAID's commitment authorisations have been or will be cancelled (with a median estimate of 34%)¹. The scale of these budget cuts could be

as much as USD 23 billion, according to USAID figures. On a comparable basis, the cuts could represent 10% of the total ODA provided by DAC members in 2023². The magnitude of these cuts calls for an analysis of their effects on the geographical and sectoral allocation of official development assistance, particularly for poor and vulnerable countries.

► Potential major consequences for poor and vulnerable countries

USAID's geographic priorities were primarily dictated by geopolitics

By 2023, a third of USAID's commitments and disbursements in grant equivalent, i.e. more than USD 11 billion, has been directed to Ukraine. The sharp rise in DAC ODA to Ukraine since the start of the war is largely due to USAID flows. Jordan, the 3rd largest recipient of USAID flows (USD 1.2 billion), is also a middle-income country, close to the United States and a conflict zone. In the past, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan have absorbed a significant proportion of USAID flows. Afghanistan was still the 5th largest recipient of USAID flows in 2023 (USD 1.1 billion in disbursements, or 3% of the total)³. For geopolitical reasons, US aid to Ukraine and Afghanistan was set to decline and disappear respectively. Nevertheless, the correlation between the geographical allocation of USAID disbursements and the presence of US forces is strong over the long term (Spear, 2016).

Does this mean that the geographical allocation of ODA/DAC as a whole, given the importance of USAID flows, will henceforth be less dependent on US geopolitical strategy? This would seem to be a hasty conclusion, given that the official justi-

1. Kenny and Sandefur (2025)

2. Official Development Assistance from DAC countries to developing countries is estimated at USD 223.7 billion in 2023, according to OECD data. USAID and MCC disbursements in grant equivalents accounted for 17% of this amount.

3. In 2023, USAID disbursed a total of nearly USD 38 billion to all recipient countries and regions combined (166) and nearly USD 32 billion for the 142 countries financed, i.e. 84% of the total disbursed.

Table1 : Annual ODA received by the top 5 USAID recipients between 2021 and 2023 (USD billion)

USAID recipient countries	Grant equivalent
Ukraine	6,93
Ethiopia	1,42
Jordan	0,85
Democratic Republic of Congo	0,72
Yemen	0,66

Source: CRS 2023; 2022; 2021 (OECD). Average of flows received by recipient countries over the last three years (2023, 2022, 2021). Prices are expressed in billions of USD at constant prices (base 2023). For US aid, the grant equivalent is very close to ODA disbursed, with loans representing only 0.5% per year on average for USAID and 1% for MCC.

fication for abolishing USAID is that its operations are insufficiently aligned with US interests. As the US administration has stated on several occasions, geopolitical interests are increasingly merging with geoeconomic interests, particularly where access to raw materials is concerned. The cases of Ukraine and the Democratic Republic of Congo are emblematic in this respect. So if US aid were to resume, in a different form and with new geographical targets, it would probably be aimed even more at countries linked to its geopolitical interests.

However, the Trump administration's decision may also reflect a reduced appetite for using ODA as part of its diplomacy, or even doubts about the geopolitical effectiveness of this instrument⁴. The closure of MCC operations seems to support this hypothesis. The list of eligible countries is determined transparently on the basis of a battery of governance indicators that are supposed to reflect the effectiveness of public investment in reducing poverty by accelerating growth. Although this method seems to guarantee the primacy of the aid effectiveness criterion, it does not eliminate geopolitical objectives, as the indicators chosen also reflect a convergence with the "Washington consensus". The US administration therefore appears to be giving up on promoting the American model through ODA. However, it

would be surprising if, in a context of heightened geostrategic rivalry with China, the United States were to give up the weapon of infrastructure funding (see below).

LDCs and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), another focus for USAID and MCC funding

In 2023, according to DAC's statistics, USAID flows to LDCs reached USD 9.8 billion in commitments and USD 11.5 billion in disbursements, i.e. 27% and 30% of USAID funding respectively. Flows to sub-Saharan Africa amounted to USD 10.3 billion in commitments and USD 11.4 billion in disbursements, representing 29% and 30% of the total respectively. There is obviously considerable overlap between the two groups : the flows are concentrated on the LDCs of sub-Saharan Africa. Five SSA countries account for 43% of commitments to LDCs in 2023: DRC, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Mozambique. In addition, Mozambique as well as Senegal, Niger and Benin, which receive significant flows from USAID, are also countries where the MCC has significant operations.

The countries most directly affected by the reduction in US ODA, apart from Ukraine, Jordan and Afghanistan, are therefore SSA's LDCs. In fact, the data published by the CGDEV confirms that the reduction in USAID funding as a proportion of the GNI of recipient countries is greatest for the LDCs of SSA. Similarly, the map below shows that some SSA countries could be even more vulnerable to US budget

4. The literature on this subject shows that the results-based policy conditionality exercised until now by the MCC can work, but that it is nevertheless encountering implementation difficulties; its effectiveness is coming up against increased 'competition' from China, whose conditionality is very different (Guillaumont et al., 2023).

Table 2 : Annual ODA received by the top 10 USAID and MCC LDC recipients between 2021 and 2023 (USD million)

USAID recipient countries	Grant equivalent	MCC recipient countries	Grant equivalent
Ethiopia	1417	Benin	103
Yemen	925	Niger	99
Democratic Republic of Congo	907	Senegal	33
Afghanistan	882	Sierra Leone	7
South Sudan	812	Nepal	6
Somalia	672	Liberia	6
Sudan	551	Lesotho	6
Uganda	470	Malawi	5
Mozambique	400	Togo	3
Tanzania	275	Timor-Leste	3

Source: CRS 2023; 2022; 2021 (OECD). Average flows received by recipient countries over the last three years (2023, 2022, 2021). Prices are expressed in millions of USD at constant prices (base 2023).

cuts, given that they receive both a large share of USAID flows and a high level of aid per capita (USD 59 of ODA per capita received for USD 653 million of ODA paid by USAID in the case of South Sudan in 2023). Nevertheless, the most fragile countries, such as South Sudan, Somalia and perhaps Ethiopia, will be spared to some extent because purely humanitarian programmes, which make up a very large proportion of interventions in these regions, are more likely to be maintained. Countries rich in natural resources, such as the DRC, could also benefit for this reason. Finally, it is the less fragile LDCs of SSA, even if they remain vulnerable, and also benefiting from MCC programmes, such as Mozambique, Niger and Senegal, that could be the hardest hit. More advanced economies, still in SSA, such as Kenya and Nigeria, are also likely to be affected.

Humanitarian aid, a key sector of US aid: hit but not sunk?

Budget cuts will be felt worldwide, regardless of the social and economic sectors (Ruth, 2025). USAID is a key player in humanitarian aid, particularly in emergency response. By 2023, it had disbursed USD 10.1 billion in this area, representing 27% of USAID flows and 5.7% of ODA/DAC flows in this area. Emergency interventions accounted for 55% of USAID disbursements to LDCs in 2023

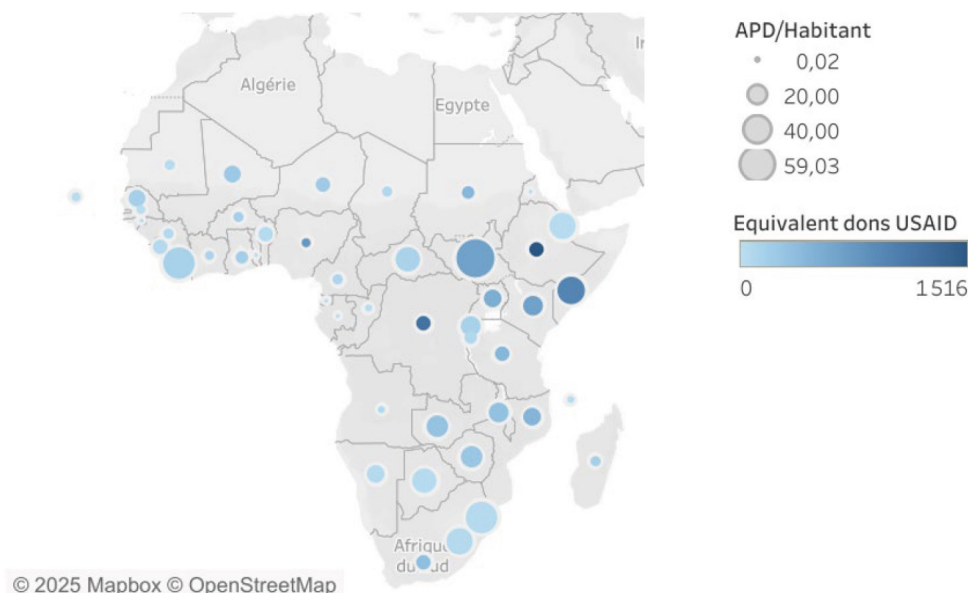
(USD 6.3 billion) and 46% of disbursements to SSA countries (USD 5.2 billion). However, the CGDEV estimates that 80% of humanitarian aid funding should be maintained. Beyond this estimate, and without underestimating the depth of the changes in the practice and philosophy of American aid, it is difficult to imagine the United States drastically reducing its responsibility and commitment to humanitarian aid, particularly in the event of a major disaster. The statement made by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in February 2025 confirms this intuition: *“Are people going to starve? Will there be a famine? Is it going to destabilise a country in a way that could harm our national interests and open the door to radical jihadists or others who would take advantage of that? If so, we will continue to act”*⁵. Nevertheless, as Leal (2025) points out, the decline in humanitarian aid could exacerbate humanitarian crises, as well as stability and peace, in the long term.

Are fragile countries in conflict the worst affected ?

US aid, particularly that from USAID, is mainly allocated to countries in conflict or fragile states. In 2023, funding for US aid to countries in conflict has accounted for 11% of total ODA, and USAID alone for

5. Fortinsky (2025), <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/5137300-marco-rubio-dumb-foreign-aid/>.

Figure 1: Map of ODA disbursed in 2023 by USAID in Sub-Saharan Africa compared with ODA per capita (USD million)



Source: map based on Tableau Public, with data from the CRS 2023 (OECD) and the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024). ODA per capita is equivalent to ODA disbursed at constant prices by the United States according to OECD DAC CRS data and United Nations population data.

94% of total US aid allocated to countries in conflict (see appendix 1) as well as 58%⁶ of aid disbursed, taking all countries and regions together. Even if this is largely humanitarian aid, the substitution of other donors will be problematic. Working in this environment is tricky and not part of the practice of bilateral donors, let alone multilateral ones, despite the progress made over the last two decades.

► The redeployment of US aid should reduce the amounts and effectiveness of global ODA

How might other donors react to US decisions? There are two opposing scenarios here: (i) a substitution scenario, in which other donors will at least partially take up the slack by increasing their efforts, and (ii) a snowball effect scenario, in which other donors will follow the direction of US

decisions to reduce but also to redeploy.

Who will take over from the United States?

In quantitative terms, can the sharp reduction in US aid be offset? Global ODA flows had already fallen by a historic 7.1% in 2024 (in constant dollars) and according to DAC forecasts (April 2025) could fall by between 9% and 17% in 2025, not only because of US decisions but also because several other major DAC members are themselves reducing their ODA. LDCs countries are projected to see a 13-25% fall in net bilateral ODA from DAC providers, and the Sub Saharian countries, a 16-28% fall (OCDE, 2025). This leads to consolidate our assumptions about the countries or regions that will be most affected by the withdrawal of aid. Furthermore, in 2027, OCDE's projections estimates that ODA cuts « will impact the poorest countries and vital services hardest », and will fall back to 2020 levels (OECD, 2025). This situation breaks the positive aid dynamic of the last 25 years. It is now clear that substitution effects will be very limited: no DAC bilateral donor appears

6. 58% of the total 38 billion paid out by USAID worldwide

Table 3: Annual ODA received by the top 10 conflict countries¹ USAID beneficiaries between 2021 and 2023 (USD billion)

USAID beneficiary countries in conflict	Grant equivalent
Ukraine	6,93
Ethiopia	1,42
Yemen	0,93
Democratic Republic of Congo	0,91
Afghanistan	0,88
South Sudan	0,81
Syrian Arab Republic	0,81
Nigeria	0,73
Somalia	0,67
Sudan	0,41

Source: CRS 2023; 2022; 2021 (OECD). Average of flows received by recipient countries in conflict over the last three years (2023, 2022, 2021). Prices are expressed in billions of USD at constant prices (base 2023).

1. Countries in conflict have been defined according to the World Bank's "List of Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations": <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/b3c737c4687db176ec98f5c434d0de910090082024/original/FCSListFY25.pdf>

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to be in a position to compensate significantly for the US withdrawal, nor do private development players. On the contrary, the US withdrawal is likely to have a knock-on effect among the countries with the tightest budgets and/or whose governments are the most sceptical about aid.

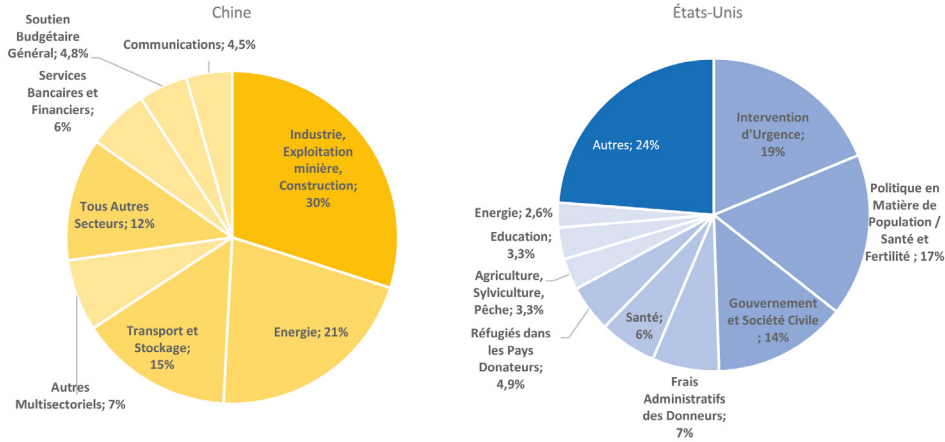
Should we expect China to take over from the United States? It is unlikely. Apart from the fact that the vast majority of its financing is non-concessional, China is on a clear trend towards reducing its flows, largely because of the excessive debt of its debtors. Furthermore, while Chinese financing is partly justified by competition with the United States, the US withdrawal may not lead to substitution but, on the contrary, to a disengagement on the part of China.

The reduction and redeployment of US aid is also likely to have major qualitative effects on global ODA and its effectiveness in achieving its development objective.

On the one hand, the volatility and unpredictability of aid flows generally has a negative impact on their effectiveness, which has been well documented in the

literature. In addition, calling long-term programmes into question can undermine what has already been achieved. For example, in the field of health, USAID financed the collection of DHS (Data Health Survey) data which, by providing information on a wide range of indicators for monitoring the state of health of populations in many developing countries, are key to implementing relevant public health policies. Failure to update them would undermine the efforts made and have collateral effects on the effectiveness of aid in this area. In this same sector, programmes such as the President's Malaria Initiative and PEPFAR (the HIV/AIDS programme) will also be heavily impacted (Barbe, 2025). In a BBC article, the Executive Director of UNAIDS, Winnie Byanyima, states that the number of AIDS-related deaths will increase by 6.3 million over the next five years if funding is not restored. In Yemen, a dozen safe havens (care centres, reproductive health and protection facilities) for women and girls have been forced to close, according to testimonies gathered by Amnesty International. However, the healthcare sector will not be the only one to be severely impacted. In fact, a study by Osendarp et al (2025) illustrates the impact of these budget cuts on food security. According to them, one million

Figure 3: Sectors financed by the United States (USAID) and China in 2023



Source: Aidata (2025); Sritharan et al (2025)

children could no longer have access to treatment for malnutrition, resulting in 163,000 deaths a year.

Moreover, the USAID funds were mainly channelled through NGOs. NGOs based in DAC countries are the third most important channel (after the United Nations) in terms of aid disbursed, accounting for 13% of total aid measured in grant equivalent. The attrition of USAID flows could endanger a number of American NGOs and, in any case, affect the effectiveness of these aid transmission channels. This is even truer for local NGOs. The cessation of USAID funding has already had a direct impact on local NGOs, as illustrated by the cases documented in the Far North of Cameroon (Dzokom and Kodji, 2025). These organisations, which are heavily dependent on USAID, have seen their budgets slashed by up to 70%, leading to mass redundancies, the closure of essential programmes (education, health, food security) and a drastic reduction in the number of beneficiaries. The sustainability of the actions carried out on the ground is under threat, and the fabric of local associations has been weakened.

On the other hand, the likely redeployment of US aid, both geographically and sectorally, is likely to give greater consideration to the economic and

geopolitical interests of the United States, the very foundation of “America First”, potentially to the detriment of many poor and vulnerable countries with no strategic interests. As Minouche Shafik (2025) points out, “the pendulum is swinging towards self-interest, towards aid that is purely for the benefit of the donor”, and Kohnert and Dirk (2025) confirm that this aid has often served geopolitical and neo-colonial interests to the detriment of sustainable, autonomous growth. This does not help to optimise its effectiveness in terms of ODA objectives (development and poverty reduction). In this case too, the extent of the impact will depend on whether the breakpoint in US ODA has a knock-on effect on that of other DAC countries. The context of heightened geopolitical and geoeconomic tensions suggest a significant knock-on effect, which would translate into a significant deterioration in aid effectiveness.

A plausible hypothesis would be that the sectoral composition of US aid (and potentially that of DAC countries) would move closer to that of Chinese funding, even though they were orthogonal in the last decades. The share of social sectors and emergency aid would be reduced in favour of financing infrastructure and production sectors, particularly the extractive industry, which are more directly linked to the interests of donor countries.

Table 4: Summary of the main sectors financed by USAID in the world, SSA and the LDCs in 2023

Main sectors financed by USAID	ODA disbursed worldwide	OPA disbursed SSA	OPA disbursed LDC
Education	1,0	0,3	0,3
Health	2,7	1,4	1,1
Population/health and fertility policy	3,6	2,2	1,5
Government and civil society	12,8	0,4	0,4
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	1,2	0,5	0,5
Manufacturing, quarrying, construction	0,0	0,0	0,0
General environmental protection	0,5	0,1	0,1
Developmental food aid	0,2	0,2	0,2
Emergency response	10,1	5,2	6,3
Donor administration costs	3,4	0,6	0,6

Source: the data comes from the CRS 2023 (OECD) and is expressed in billions of dollars. The table shows the main sectors¹ financed by USAID in 2023 (10 out of 23).

1. Sectors were: (i) classified according to the OECD list of CRS object codes and voluntary budget identifier codes; (ii) grouped by general category (DAC code ending in o).

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► Conclusion

US decisions on ODA will have significant direct and indirect effects on the overall volume of aid and its effectiveness. Even if it is conceivable that the US will redirect some of the cut budgets towards purposes that better serve what the new White House administration believes to be in the US geopolitical interest, a sharp reduction in US aid is expected. Given the geographical and sectoral structure of US aid, the countries most exposed to US withdrawal are among the poorest and most vulnerable, and therefore among those most in need of assistance.

In the current circumstances, marked by increasing budgetary constraints on the main donors, it is unlikely that the US withdrawal will lead to an additional effort to replace the United States. On the contrary, it is to be feared that American decisions will have a negative knock-on effect on other ODA flows. In addition to this quantitative effect, there are likely to be negative qualitative effects on the effectiveness of aid, due to the growing importance of geostrategic objectives.

It is also possible that these qualitative effects will also have quantitative repercussions, with the decline in aid effectiveness - *in the sense of an objective to reduce poverty and improve living conditions in the poorest and most vulnerable countries*—reinforcing scepticism about its foundations, on the part of both donors and recipients.

Without denying the factors that can sometimes legitimize the profound questioning of the “ODA” tool by part of the world, particularly in the South, Europe could have a role to play as a political leader by asserting itself as the last resort promoter of a renewed development policy that nevertheless guarantees the development objective of the poorest and most vulnerable countries. The forthcoming Seville Conference could be an opportunity for Europe to display this specificity, but the path taken by some of its members in recent months in terms of aid is unfortunately similar, all things considered, to that of the United States: contraction of volumes and politicization of interventions.

► Appendix

Table 5: ODA to conflict-affected countries from different US aid agencies in 2023 (USD billion)

US aid agency	Grant equivalent	Grant equivalent
African Development Foundation	0,005	0,02 %
Agency for International Development	22,080	94 %
Department of Agriculture	0,077	0,33 %
Department of Commerce	0,000	0 %
Department of Defense	0,029	0,12 %
Department of Energy	0,029	0,12 %
Department of Health and Human Services	0,537	2 %
Department of Labor	0,005	0,02 %
Department of the Treasury	0,002	0,01 %
Department of Transportation	0,000	0 %
Inter-American Development Foundation	0,003	0,01 %
International Development Finance Corporation	0,000	0 %
Millennium Challenge Corporation	0,099	0,42 %
Peace Corps	0,011	0,04 %
State Department	0,718	3 %
Trade and Development Agency	0,005	0,02 %
Total	23,601	100 %

Source: CRS 2023 (OECD). Prices are expressed in billions of USD at constant prices (base 2023).

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