

Official development assistance is the opposite of solidarity

Monday 7 May 2018, by [DUVAL Jérôme](#) (Date first published: 6 April 2018).

On the 11th of April, 2017, at the end of its report, the OECD proudly announced an increase in official development assistance for the past year: “In 2016, net official development assistance ODA) of the member countries of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) OECD reached a new high of USD 142.6 billion. This represents an increase of 8.9% compared to 2015, taking into account exchange rates and inflation rates. Net ODA also increased as a percentage of gross national income (GNI) to 0.32%. “DAC President Charlotte Petri Gornitzka hastened to add: “I am delighted to see that DAC donor support for development made another annual increase, and I hope that this upward trend will continue.”

Fortunately, the CNCD report on Belgian Development Aid [[1](#)] adds to the pile of studies that put pressure on those who still believe in the generosity of ODA donors to the so-called developing countries (DCs). Because behind this display of generosity - which is supposedly rising - lies a growing diversion of aid to the donor countries themselves for the implementation of restrictive migration policies that, incidentally, violate international law. This aid diversion mechanism, which also works to the benefit of the private sector of the DAC's western member countries, turns rich countries into the first recipients of their own aid, to the detriment of the populations of the poor countries that are supposed to be the first beneficiaries.

Global ODA reached \$142.6 billion in 2016, but for whom?

A celebration of the OECD that must be qualified immediately in light of the figures, first and foremost because the poorest countries, called “least developed countries” (LDCs) in Western institutional jargon, do not benefit from this increase but instead register a decrease of 3.9% of the aid allocated to them between 2015 and 2016 [[2](#)]. Second, because the overall donor average of 0.32% of GNI remains far too low, representing less than half of the 0.7% of GNI target, an objective officially recognised by a UN resolution... in October 1970! Only five out of 29 countries have reached this milestone set more than forty-seven years ago [[3](#)]: Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden and Denmark, joined this year by Germany.

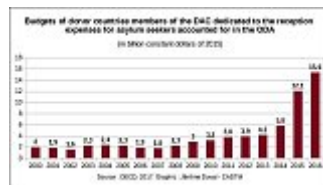
In addition, despite this increase in ODA, UNESCO warns that international aid for basic education, a first priority development, has decreased by 6% compared to 2010. Sub-Saharan Africa received half as much aid for basic education between 2002 and 2015, while the region accounts for almost half of all out-of-school children in the world.

Finally, note that erasures of debts are also recorded in ODA, but they do not correspond to a real transfer of resources but are simple accounting operations that allow donors to “inflate” ODA figures. In 2005 and 2006, debt relief for Iraq and Nigeria accounted for a large part of the increase in aid. In 2008, in service of the geostrategic stakes of the United States, the main recipients of aid were Iraq (12% of total ODA) and Afghanistan (4%) [[4](#)].

Reception expenses for asylum seekers accounted for in ODA

This rebound in ODA in 2016 is partly explained by a shift in aid that is increasingly mobilised to curb migration flows. Immigration flows from countries in crisis (Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, many African countries beset by wars and famine [5] and other established dictatorships...), to which some of the largest contributors of ODA sell their weapons and send armed contingents, swell the ranks of asylum seekers, which results in an increase in “reception expenses”. However, a 1988 Development assistance committee rule authorises donor countries to record in the ODA certain expenditures on refugees during the first year following their arrival [6], such as expenses to ensure their transfer to the host country, reception centres for asylum seekers, emergency accommodation, social support services, food and training, even if these people are deported at the end of the process. Some states, like Greece, even include amounts allocated to control their borders!

Costs associated with taking care of asylum seekers increased by 27.5% between 2015 and 2016 to reach \$15.4 billion, or 10.8% of total ODA in 2016. The share of aid to refugees thus averages 2.1% of net aid from DAC countries in 2008 to 10.8% in 2016 [7]. The explosion of these budgets, obviously spent in donor countries, turns the majority of European contributors into the first beneficiaries of their own aid. For eleven countries, migration management expenditure accounted for more than 10% of their ODA. Germany, Greece, Italy and Austria devoted more than 20%, still counted as ODA. For example, Germany, which in 2016 joined the club of countries that have reached the UN threshold of 0.7% of GNI, saw a doubling of the cost of refugees in the country compared to 2015, which artificially inflated its ODA budget. In Belgium, the “reception expenses” of asylum seekers included in ODA amounted to €349 million in 2016, or 17% of Belgian public aid as a whole. And this amount now exceeds the sub-total of government cooperation. With regard to France, the amount of definitive ODA declared to the DAC for the reception of refugees amounted to 422 million Euro in 2016 [8].



If the money mobilised does not contribute to the goal of poverty reduction and does not serve the development of the countries that ODA is supposed to help, the hardening of the asylum policy thus contributes towards artificially inflating the share of aid from the donor country. As the very height of cynicism, this deviation of aid benefits Western companies in the field of migration management, largely in the process of being privatised [9].

In comparison with other cash flows, this aid, which boasts of working towards development, represents very little. Despite the inconsistency of ODA in terms of migration policy, those who actually contribute more effectively to development, are the migrants who send three times more money than ODA to their country of origin. Indeed, despite a decrease for the second year in a row in money sent from migrants from developing countries to their countries of origin, this still reached \$429 billion in 2016 (compared to \$440 billion in 2015) [10], a sum 3 times larger than the ODA (142 billion). Without these contributions of migrants from Western countries to their families, the survival of a large part of the population of the developing countries would be even more compromised.

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P.S.

Original title: official development assistance at the antipodes of solidarity
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Footnotes

[1] CNCD, "[Aide belge au développement](#)", 2017 report.

[2] **Already in 2002-2003, only 41% of global ODA was directed to the 50 least developed countries (LDCs).**

[3] See the list of 29 countries in addition to the European Union DAC members [here](#) and [there](#).

[4] Gérard Perroulaz, Claudie Fioroni and Gilles Carbonnier, "[Évolutions et enjeux de la coopération internationale au développement](#)", Graduate Institute, Geneva, 2010.

[5] In March 2017 the United Nations announced that in Yemen, Nigeria, South Sudan and Somalia, four countries at war, 20 million people were at risk of starvation. In Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo, 3 million people are in need of emergency food aid, according to the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU). Read the WAEMU [press release](#), 8 June, 2017. See also "[Afrique de l'ouest : 3 millions de personnes en urgence alimentaire selon l'UEMOA](#)", Jeune Afrique with AFP, June 9, 2017.

[6] The term "refugees" as used by DAC covers the concept of asylum seekers.

[7] Gérard Perroulaz, Claudie Fioroni and Gilles Carbonnier, *ibid*.

[8] See the notice registered at the Presidency of the Senate on 23 November, 2017 by Mr Jean-Pierre VIAL and Mrs Marie-Françoise PEROL-DUMONT, Senate, <https://www.senat.fr/rap/a17-110-4/a17-110-41.pdf>.

[9] Benoit Coumont, Jérôme Duval, Ludivine Faniel, "[À qui profite la gestion des migrations?](#)", CADTM, 27 October, 2017.

[10] "[Remittances to Developing Countries Decline for Second Consecutive Year](#)", World Bank, 21 April, 2017.