

Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
Tuesday 1 September 2026
2nd Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Scottish Government Priorities regarding Europe, External Affairs and International Development

Introductory evidence session with the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy and the Minister for Equalities and International Development

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide Members with background briefing for the Committee's introductory evidence session with the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy and the Minister for Equalities and International Development.
2. Attached at **Annexe A** is a background briefing on Europe and External Affairs.
3. The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy has also provided an outline of the priorities within the Europe and External Affairs portfolio. This is attached at **Annexe B**.
4. Attached at **Annexe C** is a background briefing on International Development.
5. The Minister for Equalities and International Development has also provided a summary of the International Development portfolio priorities. This is attached at **Annexe D**.

Clerks to the Committee
August 2026

Annexe A: Background briefing on Europe and External Affairs

Committee remit and responsibilities of the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy.

1. The Parliament has agreed that the remit for the Session 7 Committee on Europe, External Affairs and Culture is as follows:
 - (a) the Scottish Government's EU and external affairs policy,
 - (b) policy in relation to the UK's relationship with the EU,
 - (c) the international activities of the Scottish Administration, including international development,
 - (d) any other matter falling within the responsibility of the Scottish Administration relating to devolution, intra-UK and intergovernmental relations, and
 - (e) matters relating to culture within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic.
2. The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy has responsibility for the following, which are relevant to the remit of the Committee:
 - external affairs,
 - Europe and the European Union including alignment,
 - Scotland's international network and Scottish connections
3. The Session 6 Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee published its [Legacy Report](#) in March 2026.

External affairs and international activities (excluding international development) – background materials

- SPICe [External affairs: subject profile](#) (June 2026)
- Session 6 CEEAC Committee report: [National Outcomes: Response to the Review of Outcomes and Indicators relating to the Scottish Government's International Work](#) (October 2024)
- Session 6 CEEAC Committee report: [Inquiry into the Scottish Governments International Work | Scottish Parliament Website](#) (April 2022)
- Scottish Government's International Strategy: [Scotland's International Strategy - gov.scot](#) (November 2024)

- Scottish Government annual report 2024-25: [International strategy: annual report 2024 to 2025 - gov.scot](#) (November 2025)
4. The Scottish Government published a range of strategic documents and strategies related to external affairs during Session 6. Further details can be found in the SPICe *External Affairs: Subject profile*, however these include:
- [Scotland's Global Affairs Framework](#) (May 2022)
 - [Scotland's International Strategy](#) (January 2024)
 - [Taking a feminist approach to international relations](#) (November 2023)
 - [Scottish Connections Framework](#) (April 2023)
 - [Ireland Scotland Bilateral Cooperation Framework 2030](#) (November 2025)

CEEAC Committee recommendations

5. In relation to the external affairs work of the Scottish Government, the CEEAC Committee undertook considerable work. Detailed recommendations can be found in their reports. These include the following:
- The international work of the Scottish Government should be strategic in approach, explicit about its priorities, and informed by a clear set of policies, values and objectives.
 - Issues prioritised in external relations should be driven by, match and inform domestic priorities - be that working towards a wellbeing economy, sustainable development, promoting gender equality, or protecting human rights etc.
 - There should be an emphasis on effective collaboration across government in relation to external affairs and how this interacts with domestic priorities, and – allied to that policy coherence – continuing work to address challenges in measuring the impact of soft power and enhancing scrutiny.
 - Support for a more collaborative approach between the Scottish Government and the UK Government on international engagement. The Committee noted the 2013 Concordat on International Relations with the UK Government
 - The Scottish Government's commitment to review the Scottish Connections Framework every two years. The Committee recommended that the Scottish Government publish a report every two years based on its review of the Framework and setting out the contribution made by its work with the diaspora in terms of promoting the values, objectives and priorities of Scotland's International Strategy.

Possible themes to explore

6. **Process and timeline for producing a new international strategy:** *Scotland's International Strategy* was published in January 2024 "to guide our approach to

international engagement and delivery to the end of the current parliamentary term.” The evidence session may be an opportunity to explore with the Minister what his plans are for any replacement strategy and the rationale behind decisions on which countries and projects the Scottish Government chooses to support.

7. **Scottish Connections Framework:** Previous CEEAC Committee work refers to the Scottish Government’s commitment to renew the framework every two years. The previous one was published in April 2023. The evidence session may be an opportunity to establish whether the framework will be reviewed and how the government plans to report on the framework. Again, the rationale behind the decisions taken could be explored.
8. **Plans for Scottish Government’s international offices:** An overview of current offices can be found on this Scottish Government [webpage](#). There are currently nine international offices. The Scottish National Party Manifesto for the 2026 elections committed to expand the number of “Scotland House consulates” around the world to over 40 by consolidating Scottish Government and Scottish Development International offices into a single network. The evidence session may be an opportunity to explore the role of the network of offices, what the Minister’s priorities are for the future, and how the plans for expansion may be implemented.
9. **Intergovernmental collaboration:** The Concordat on International Relations with the UK Government dates from 2013. Since then, a new set of structures and arrangements have been put in place in terms of intergovernmental relations. Committee Members may wish to explore how these intergovernmental structures relate to collaboration on international affairs.

Scottish Government EU policy and policy in relation to the UK’s relationship with the EU European Union – background materials

- SPICe blog: [A closer relationship? How are UK-EU negotiations progressing? \(December 2025\)](#)
- SPICe blog: [UK-EU negotiations on a youth experience scheme and association to Erasmus+ \(Updated 17 December 2025\)](#)
- [Scotland’s priorities for new UK–EU strategic alliance - UK in a changing Europe](#) (Interview with the then Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture from December 2025)

Session 6 CEEAC Committee reports

- [UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement: Barriers to trade in goods and opportunities to improve the UK-EU trading relationship](#)
- [UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement: trade in services, youth mobility, and touring artists; and opportunities to improve the UK-EU trading relationship](#)

- [How Devolution is Changing Post-EU](#)

Provision of Information Agreements with the Scottish Government

- Working arrangements - Scrutiny of the UK EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement
- EU Alignment – Agreement with Scottish Ministers on Provision of Information
- REUL Act updates

CEEAC Committee Recommendations

10. The CEEAC Committee undertook a considerable amount of work on UK-EU relations, implications for Scotland and the Scottish Government's policy of alignment. Over the course of this work, it made a wide range of recommendations, the detail of which can be found in the individual reports. These include the following:

- The CEEAC Committee Legacy Report recommended that a successor committee should give consideration to the scrutiny of the Scottish Government's policy to align with EU law early in Session 7, and that it may wish to carry out some work early in Session 7 in relation to the review of the "keeping pace power".
- The Legacy report also recommended that the written agreements on EU Alignment and on the UK EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement should be continued in Session 7.
- CEEAC Committee recognised the significant difficulties that Scottish businesses are experiencing in navigating and complying with the customs and regulatory requirements of trading with the EU and considered that greater support and guidance was required from the UK Government and Scottish Government to manage the complexity of the new trading environment.

Possible themes to explore

11. **Priorities for Scottish Government's EU policy and relations with the UK Government on EU matters:** The Minister for Europe, External Relations and Energy made a [statement to the Scottish Parliament](#) on 18 June 2026, the tenth anniversary of the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU. In setting out next steps, he referred to the need to press for the closest possible relationship between the UK and the EU, to ensure that Scotland's voice is heard and to the need to recognise that there is a limit to what can be achieved under the current constitutional framework. He stated "I am still unsure as to why the UK Government is sticking to its damaging red lines on the Single Market and the Customs Union".

12. The Minister undertook a first trip to Brussels at the end of June 2026.

13. On 20 July 2026, Hamish Falconer was appointed Minister of State (Minister for Intergovernmental Relations and European Relations) in the new UK Government of Prime Minister Andy Burnham.
14. Members may wish to take the opportunity to discuss with the Minister what he sees as the priorities in relation to Scottish Government engagement with the EU, and its Member states, and what the outcomes of his recent visit to Brussels were. It would also be an opportunity to explore with the Minister what he anticipates the impact of the new UK Government will be on the implementation of Scottish Government EU priorities.
15. **Scottish Government's policy to align with EU policy:** Following the UK's withdrawal from the EU, the Scottish Government took the decision to remain aligned with EU law "where appropriate and in a manner that contributes towards maintaining and advancing standards across a range of policy areas".¹ Such alignment can be achieved by primary legislation (bills), or secondary legislation (statutory instruments), where powers exist to do so. A further option is by using the so-called "keeping pace power" under section 1(1) of the Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021. This power allows Scottish Ministers to make regulations that continue to keep the law in Scotland aligned with EU law in areas of devolved competence, provided the purpose of doing so includes maintaining and advancing standards in certain policy areas (the policy areas are environmental protection, animal health and welfare, plant health, equality, non-discrimination and human rights, social protection). The "keeping pace" power has been used three times. It is set to expire in late March 2027. It could be extended until 2031 if regulations to that end are passed by affirmative procedure.
16. The evidence session could be an opportunity to explore what the Scottish Government's assessment is of how successful its policy to align with EU law has been, what impact its policy has had e.g. on businesses, and what its plans are in this respect for the future, including in relation to the "keeping pace" power.
17. **Postponed UK-EU Summit and planned UK Government European Partnership Bill:** A Common Understanding was agreed at the EU-UK summit in May 2025.² It contains references to "dynamic alignment" in a number of areas, including, for example, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures. It states that:

" ... the SPS Agreement should ensure the application of the same rules at all times by providing for timely dynamic alignment of the rules applicable to and in the United Kingdom acting in respect of Great Britain with all the relevant European Union rules, giving due regard to the United Kingdom's constitutional and parliamentary procedures; and where necessary to ensure the European Union's level of food, sanitary, and phytosanitary safety, through the immediate application of the relevant European Union rules".

¹ [UK Withdrawal from the European Union \(Continuity\) \(Scotland\) Act 2021, July 2022 - regulation making power under Section 1: statement of policy - gov.scot](#)

² [UK-EU Summit - Common Understanding \(HTML\) - GOV.UK](#)

18. Sanitary and phytosanitary measures are defined as standards to protect human, animal, or plant life from risks arising from additives, contaminants, toxins or disease-causing organisms in foods, beverages, or feedstuffs.³ This would be relevant to the Scottish Parliament as they relate to matters that are devolved.
19. The SPICe Briefing [The intergovernmental relations 'reset': one year on](#) (July 2025) refers to comments by the then Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture Angus Robertson MSP who, while welcoming some aspects of the 2025 deal, told the Scottish Parliament that the UK Government had made the agreement "without the explicit engagement of the devolved Governments on the negotiation detail – not least on fisheries", which he described as "an affront to devolution".⁴ The Cabinet Secretary referred to the cancellation of three scheduled meetings of the relevant [Interministerial Group](#) before the agreement was announced, and stated that "excluding devolved Governments from meaningful consultation, repeatedly cancelling communications and sharing important details only after agreement has been reached in devolved areas is not a reset".⁵ However, the then Secretary of State for Scotland has said that the Scottish Government were "fully informed all the way through" the negotiation process.⁶
20. The subsequent EU-UK summit, due to take place in July 2026, was postponed, in light of political changes. At time of writing a new date had not yet been announced.
21. Following the Common Understanding, the UK Government announced its plans for a European Partnership Bill to facilitate the implementation of strengthened ties with the EU as set out in the recent King's Speech. The background briefing notes accompanying the King's Speech in May 2026⁷ set out that "The European Partnership Bill will help deliver the manifesto commitment to improve the UK's trade and investment relationship with the EU by facilitating the implementation of new deals agreed with the EU now and in the future. This includes deals on electricity, emissions trading, and food and drink". It explains that "the Bill will provide a framework of powers to ensure agreements with the EU can be implemented now and in the future".
22. In the Scottish Government's written evidence to the CEEAC Committee inquiry into transparency of intergovernmental activity, it stated, in relation to the anticipated UK Government Bill, that it expected "that the Scottish Parliament's Standing Order requirements on legislative consent will be engaged".⁸
23. The evidence session could be an opportunity to seek clarification on:

³ [Sanitary and phytosanitary measures | Access2Markets](#)

⁴ [Meeting of the Parliament: 20/05/2025 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

⁵ [Meeting of the Parliament: 20/05/2025 | Scottish Parliament Website](#)

⁶ [EU deal gives '12 years of certainty' to Scottish fishermen, says Murray | The Herald](#)

⁷ [CORRECTED CLEAN 27 May FINAL Embargoed Lobby Pack 2026](#)

⁸ [igr--scottish-government.pdf](#)

- the latest contacts that the Scottish Government has had with the UK Government on the plans for the EU-UK summit, and the anticipated scope and outcomes of negotiations.
- what the Scottish Government's assessment is of the impact of its policies on the UK Government's position towards the EU and the progress of negotiations with the EU.
- what the Scottish Government considers the impact of recent political changes could be i.e. of the appointment of a new Prime Minister and a new Minister of State for Intergovernmental Relations and European Relations.
- any updates on the planned timetable and content of the UK Government Bill and what powers the Scottish Government anticipates that the UK Government Bill will contain in order to implement "dynamic alignment".
- how any dynamic alignment would be implemented in areas of devolved policy, including if it did result in a power for UK Government Ministers to make policy in areas of devolved competence through UK Statutory Instruments; including implications for parliamentary scrutiny.
- How it is working with the UK Government to improve the support and guidance available to businesses to manage the complexity of the new trading environment.

Clerks to the Committee
August 2026

Annexe B: Correspondence from the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy

Patrick Harvie
MSP
Convener
Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
Scottish Parliament

27th August 2026

Dear Patrick,

In advance of the ministerial evidence session at the Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee on Tuesday 1 September, please find attached an outline of the priorities within my ministerial portfolio relevant to the work of the Committee.

This information accompanies a separate update from the Minister for Equalities and International Development Ms Kumar.

I look forward to discussing these matters further with the Committee next

week. Yours sincerely,

STEPHEN GETHINS

Introduction

The Scottish Government regards international engagement as indispensable part of delivering its wider policy objectives both on the global stage and at a domestic level in Scotland. Strong international relations, particularly with the European Union, are vital to drive growth, attract investment, support our transition to net zero, and to enhance Scotland's resilience in an increasingly volatile world. There are few, if any domestic issues, unaffected by the world around us. This Government will also seek to ensure that Scotland contributes positively as a responsible global citizen.

Following the recent Scottish Parliament election, the Government has renewed its commitment to take an active international role and will continue to build on the approach pursued by successive previous Scottish Governments.

Scottish Government priorities for the coming parliamentary term will be set out in the forthcoming Programme for Government and international engagement supports the delivery of many of these objectives.

External Affairs

The global environment is more uncertain than at any point in recent history, with the rules-based international order increasingly under strain and challenged and our well-being undermined by geopolitical tensions and instability.

Events overseas have a direct impact at home, affecting public services, economic resilience and the day-to-day lives of communities across Scotland. One example of how international events have direct consequences for people and businesses in Scotland is the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and Russia's war in Ukraine, where the continued instability contributes to higher energy and fuel costs, increased food prices, supply chain disruption, and wider inflationary pressures, with associated impacts on household finances, businesses and public services. This is exacerbated by the UK's decision to leave the European Union, with the associated impact on public finances and the cost of living. The Scottish Government continues to monitor developments closely, to assess potential impacts on Scotland, raise these issues in our international engagements and to work with partners to support resilience in the face of these international challenges.

Scotland must adapt to this new global reality where uncertainty and disruption will persist. Building resilience into the way we work, plan and invest will be essential in order to withstand future shocks and seize new opportunities.

If we can succeed on the international stage there are opportunities for Scotland not only to strengthen its resilience, but also to secure long-term economic and social benefits through our work globally. We are doing this by deepening international engagement and strategic partnerships, promoting Scotland as a highly desirable place to live, work, study, visit, trade and invest, and strengthening cooperation with international partners on shared challenges such as climate change, energy and other security matters and economic resilience. These actions will help ensure

Scotland is well placed to respond to future challenges, while creating sustainable economic opportunities and improving outcomes for people across the country.

Soft power

Scotland's soft power is a significant national asset. Through Brand Scotland building on our strengths in culture, education, research, innovation, sport, major events and our global diaspora, we are enhancing Scotland's international profile, sharing knowledge and skills, deepening relationships with key partners and attracting investment, talent, students and visitors. This helps translate Scotland's global reputation and international connections into economic opportunities and wider benefits for communities and businesses across the country.

Our connections with international partners both within and outside of Europe remain vitally important and we will continue to build and strengthen those relationships as an outward looking, constructive and internationally engaged nation.

Scotland's diaspora

Scotland's diaspora is a significant and unique international asset, extending the country's influence and connections far beyond its borders and supporting Scotland's economic, cultural and diplomatic objectives. Scotland takes an inclusive approach to diaspora engagement, recognising people of Scottish heritage, former residents, alumni of Scottish institutions, and those with cultural, professional, or personal ties to Scotland as part of its global community. Global Scottish networks help attract investment, promote trade and tourism, support talent and skills exchange, and raise awareness of Scotland's strengths on the world stage. At the same time, diaspora communities serve as ambassadors for Scottish culture, values and identity, enhancing Scotland's reputation internationally. By investing in these people-to-people connections and sustaining meaningful relationships, Scotland strengthens its global relationships and creates opportunities that benefit both the country and its international communities. Our diaspora work is an investment in a cherished community with benefits at home and greater reach overseas.

Working with the UK Government

The Scottish Government is committed to constructive and effective intergovernmental relations and to working collaboratively with the UK Government and other Devolved Governments on international matters where we share interests and objectives. While there has been positive engagement on a range of issues, arrangements for discussing international matters can still be ad hoc, and are not always embedded within the wider Intergovernmental Relations framework. The previous iteration of this Committee highlighted the importance of the Concordat on International Relations within the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding on Devolution and the need for greater collaboration in this area.

We would welcome a renewed focus on ensuring that the Concordat operates effectively within current Intergovernmental Relations arrangements, supported by more regular and strategic discussion of international issues at both ministerial and official level. This would help strengthen information sharing, improve coordination on international activity, and ensure Scotland's interests and expertise are

effectively reflected in areas where UK and devolved government responsibilities intersect.

High North

In this period of profound global change, marked by Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and conflict in the Middle East, international collaboration is more important than ever. The High North remains an area of significant importance for the Scottish Government, and we are committed to ensuring that Scotland continues to play an active and constructive role in the High North cooperation. The Scottish Government's Arctic Connections Policy Framework, launched in 2019, has strengthened collaboration with Arctic and sub-Arctic nations through knowledge exchange on shared challenges including climate change, community resilience and sustainable economic development. Following a recent evaluation of the Framework, the Scottish Government has gained valuable evidence and insights into its impact and effectiveness, which will help shape the next phase of Scotland's international engagement in the region and inform a renewed international strategy. Building on these foundations, we will continue to work closely with Arctic, Nordic and Baltic partners and support Scottish participation in key international forums such as the Arctic Circle Assembly, which has in the past also attracted strong Parliamentary attendance. We will also draw on the expertise of the Scottish Arctic Network, and our offices in Copenhagen, Ottawa and Washington DC to deepen Scotland's Arctic relationships and reinforce Scotland's role as a European gateway to the Arctic.

EU Relations

The Scottish Government remains committed to strengthening Scotland's relationship with the European Union. As set out in its electoral mandate, it continues to support Scotland's return to EU membership and considers this the most effective means of securing Scotland's long-term prosperity and interests. We also recognise that within the Parliament there is a majority for a swift return to membership of the European Union. Our status outside the EU continues to bear a heavy cost on the public purse whilst restricting opportunities for businesses and citizens alike. While we support efforts to deepen UK-EU cooperation within current constitutional arrangements, we maintain that only EU membership can fully address the economic, social and political impacts of the UK sitting outside the European Union.

UK EU negotiations

We welcome the UK Government's efforts to improve relations with the European Union. However, we support a more ambitious and cooperative partnership than cannot be achieved within the Government's current negotiating red lines. The postponement of the planned second UK-EU Leaders' Summit is a missed opportunity to sustain momentum in the reset of UK-EU relations. The summit was intended to build on the Common Understanding reached at the first summit in May 2025 and to provide strategic direction for the next phase of engagement. It is important that a new date is agreed at the earliest opportunity to maintain

momentum and confidence in the process.

Scotland also has distinct interests that must be fully reflected in UK-EU negotiations. Key priorities include agriculture, food and drink, energy, and the creative industries. Scottish Ministers have emphasised the need to safeguard Scotland's agricultural interests, including the oats sector, and to reduce barriers faced by touring artists and cultural professionals seeking to work across Europe.

Scottish Ministers strongly support progress towards agreement in a number of priority areas. In particular, Scotland has a clear interest in securing:

- a comprehensive Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement to reduce barriers affecting agri-food trade.
- linking of the UK and EU Emissions Trading Schemes (ETS) to support climate objectives and provide greater certainty for business.
- a Youth Experience Scheme (YES) which allows young people from Scotland and EU member states to live, work and gain experience in each other's countries.
- closer cooperation on energy policy, including progress towards participation in the EU Internal Electricity Market.
- options for participation in EU Programmes, with priorities focused on Horizon Europe (FP10), the European Competitiveness Fund, European Territorial Cooperation, as well as the Creative Europe successor programme, AgoraEU.

We welcome reports of meaningful progress in negotiations on sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures and emissions trading. Discussions on a Youth Experience Scheme have, we understand, proved more challenging. It will be important to avoid any funding gap that could disadvantage Scotland's universities, while continuing to work towards an ambitious agreement that delivers meaningful opportunities for mobility, study, work and cultural exchange.

While welcome, these agreements can address only part of the damage caused by leaving the European Union. The UK's negotiating red lines, including on remaining outside the Single Market, and ruling out a return to freedom of movement, restrict opportunities for deeper cooperation and prevent the full benefits of closer EU relations from being realised. The Scottish Government therefore supports a broader and more ambitious programme of engagement and cooperation with the European Union.

There remains considerable scope to deepen UK-EU cooperation across a whole range of areas, including trade, labour mobility, justice and home affairs, defence and security, participation in EU programmes, and collaboration in research, innovation, education and culture. The Scottish Government therefore encourages the UK Government to pursue further alignment with the European Union where it serves Scotland's economic and social interests.

The Scottish Government is also closely monitoring the EU's evolving competitiveness and security agenda, including proposals that could introduce "Made in Europe" requirements across industrial and decarbonisation policies. We support the EU's objectives of strengthening industrial resilience and advancing the clean transition, while also advocating for arrangements that preserve fair market

access for Scottish businesses and that enable their continued participation in European supply chains to the mutual benefit of Scotland and the EU.

Influencing the UK EU negotiations

Meaningful involvement in the negotiation and implementation of UK-EU agreements remains a major priority for the Scottish Government, particularly where agreements affect devolved matters, as successful delivery depends on early engagement with those responsible for policy and services in Scotland. Effective four-nation cooperation is essential both to securing UK-EU agreements that reflect the interests of all parts of the UK and to building the closest possible relationship with the European Union.

Intergovernmental engagement is essential if UK-EU agreements are to reflect the interests and responsibilities of all parts of the UK, as there are few, if any, areas of discussion between the EU and UK that do not affect the devolved institutions. The Scottish Government has consistently argued that Devolved Governments should be involved at every stage of the process, including through access to negotiating texts where possible, opportunities to contribute to UK negotiating mandates, engagement with negotiating teams, and partnership working on delivery.

Scottish Ministers will continue to advocate for arrangements that provide Devolved Governments with timely information, meaningful opportunities to influence negotiating positions, and a full role in implementation planning where devolved responsibilities are engaged.

Legislative scrutiny and arrangements

Future UK-EU agreements must be implemented in a manner that fully respects devolved competence and the role of the Scottish Parliament. The proposed European Partnership Bill is likely to provide the legislative framework for future agreements, and the Scottish Government will expect close engagement from the UK Government throughout the development of the Bill and any associated secondary legislation. Implementation arrangements should reinforce, rather than erode, the role of devolved institutions.

The UK's commitment to a reset in UK-EU relations, and the prospect of greater regulatory alignment with the EU, is welcome not least because it will ease unnecessary regulatory burdens on Scottish businesses. But it also provides an opportunity to revisit aspects of the UK's post-Brexit domestic framework. In particular, it should allow for a more evidence-based appraisal of the purpose and operation of the centralising Internal Market Act (IMA), imposed on the Scottish Parliament without its consent. The Act was justified by the UK Government in part as a response to regulatory divergence arising from EU exit. As cooperation and alignment with the EU increase, the basis for that argument falls away.

Conclusion

Scotland is an international and outward looking nation. That is reflected in the work and aspirations of this Government. Global insecurity and instability in recent years

have underlined the impact of international areas on domestic policy, including by exacerbating the cost-of-living crisis. The UK's decision to leave the European Union and the UK Government's continued red lines leave the country uniquely exposed in democratic Europe at a time when the rest of the continent is pulling closer together. The Scottish Government welcomes the engagement of the Committee and other parliamentarians in scrutinising what is a crucial area of work, and one that is central to delivering the Scottish Government's priorities.

Annexe C: Background briefing on International Development

Committee Remit and the responsibilities of the Minister for Equalities and International Development

1. The Parliament has agreed that the remit for the Session 7 Committee on Europe, External Affairs and Culture is as follows:
 - (a) the Scottish Government's EU and external affairs policy,
 - (b) policy in relation to the UK's relationship with the EU,
 - (c) the international activities of the Scottish Administration, including international development,
 - (d) any other matter falling within the responsibility of the Scottish Administration relating to devolution, intra-UK and intergovernmental relations, and
 - (e) matters relating to culture within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education, Culture and Gaelic.
2. The Minister for Equalities and International Development has responsibility for the following matters, falling within the remit of the Committee:
 - international development, strategy and implementation
3. The Session 6 Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee published its [Legacy Report](#) in March 2026.

International Development background

4. The Scottish Government has provided support for international development since 2005. Funding is delivered through the [International Development Fund](#), the [Climate Justice Fund](#), and the [Humanitarian Emergency Fund](#). Scottish Government development assistance is provided in four partner countries: Malawi, Zambia, Rwanda and Pakistan (humanitarian assistance is provided globally). Support is generally delivered through partnerships with NGOs, charities and other organisations in Scotland and partner countries rather than directly to partner-country governments.
5. In recent years, new programmes have focussed on:
 - **health**, focussing on tackling non-communicable diseases (such as heart disease, cancer, chronic respiratory disease, and diabetes)
 - **inclusive education**, focussing on improving access to education for girls and learners with additional support needs

- **equalities**, aimed at supporting the advancement of gender equality, the rights of women and girls, and the protection of vulnerable groups.
6. Globally, 2024 and 2025 saw significant reductions in global aid driven by spending cuts from major donor countries. The [2026/27 Scottish Budget allocates](#):

- £16 million to the International Development Fund and the Humanitarian Emergency Fund (combined), of which £1 million is ringfenced for humanitarian aid. This represents a 26.5% increase on the 2025/26 budget.
- £12.7 million to the Climate Justice Fund.

The Scottish Government has started publishing information on its [official development assistance](#) spend from 2025 onwards through the [International Aid Transparency Initiative](#).

7. The following materials may be of interest for further background:

- SPICe [External affairs: subject profile](#) (June 2026)
- SPICe blog [The Scottish Government's international development programme – 20 years on](#) (January 2026)
- [Review of Scottish Government's Humanitarian Funding - our future response to global humanitarian crises](#) (March 2026)
- First Minister Statement to Parliament [Scotland's commitment to international development](#) (28 October 2025)
- Scottish Government [Contribution to international development: report 2021 to 2023](#) (November 2024)
- Scottish Government's International Strategy: [Scotland's International Strategy - gov.scot](#) (November 2024)
- Scottish Government annual report 2024-25: [International strategy: annual report 2024 to 2025 - gov.scot](#) (November 2025)
- Cross-party Group on International Development: [Report on Scotlands International Development Funding](#) (June 2025)
- Session 6 CEEAC Committee report: [National Outcomes: Response to the Review of Outcomes and Indicators relating to the Scottish Government's International Work](#) (October 2024) and [Scottish Government response to the report's recommendations](#) (January 2025)
- Session 6 CEEAC Committee report: [Inquiry into the Scottish Governments International Work | Scottish Parliament Website](#) (April 2022)

CEEAC Committee Recommendations

8. The Session 6 CEEAC Committee *Inquiry into the Scottish Government's International Work* (April 2022) and its report on *National Outcomes: Response to the Review of Outcomes and Indicators relating to the Scottish Government's International Work* (October 2024) contained a number of recommendations relevant for the Scottish Government's international development policy and activities. The [Scottish Government responded in January 2025](#) to the recommendations made in the October 2024 report. Further details of the specific recommendations can be found in the reports. These included the points below.
9. Issues prioritised in external relations - be that working towards a wellbeing economy, sustainable development, promoting gender equality, or protecting human rights etc - should be driven by, match and inform domestic priorities.
10. The Committee noted the importance placed on policy coherence by the OECD and UN, the latter's sustainable development goals including a policy coherence target. In the interests of rigorous decision making and accountability, the Committee underlined that it must be provided with sufficient information to determine where there is policy coherence, where it is lacking, or where the case can be made for trade-offs or compromise.
11. The Committee recognised that public interest and understanding are a key component in appreciation of how actions and behaviour in Scotland can impact on people elsewhere. The Committee recommended the Scottish Government give consideration to how it can raise public awareness not only of its international policy overall, but also an understanding of specific issues such as sustainability, climate justice, human rights etc.
12. Despite the challenges in devising metrics, the Committee noted evidence suggesting the potential for measurability or assessment in such policy areas as conflict resolution, feminist foreign policy, and the promotion of human rights and climate justice. The Committee also addressed the theme of working with others (e.g. in education and third sector) to improve understanding of the impact of Scottish Government work in the international arena.

Possible themes to explore

13. **Scottish Government strategy for international development policy:** The SPICe blog from January 2026 refers to the Scottish Government's review in 2021 of its international development policy, and that no new international development strategy has been produced since then. Members may wish to explore with the Minister what her priorities are for this parliamentary session, and whether the Scottish Government plans to produce a new strategy for its international development work.
14. **Country and thematic focus:** As part of its exploration of the priorities of the new Minister, Members may wish to address:
 - reasons for the specific country-focus of the Scottish Government's international development work,

- current and future thematic focus of work, including structure of funding schemes (international development, humanitarian assistance, climate justice),
- how the Scottish Government decides whether and how to target funding related to humanitarian emergencies/crises.

15. Contribution of international development work to delivering Scotland's International Strategy and other policies: Previous work has highlighted the need for a strategic approach, related to domestic priorities, policy coherence, and the challenges of measuring impact and producing relevant data. The evidence session could be an opportunity to explore how the priorities of the Scottish Government's work on international development connect with other strands of Scottish Government policy, including its International Strategy, National Performance Framework and other domestic priorities, and what work the Scottish Government is doing to improve the measuring of the impact of its international development work. It may provide an opportunity for discussion on how the Committee can best scrutinise the work in this field during Session 7. The National Performance Framework is currently under review, and the [proposed new outcomes](#) do not include an international outcome. The proposal does include a [statement on 'cross-cutting perspectives'](#), which include Scotland's place in the world. The evidence session could provide an opportunity to explore how the impact of international development support will be captured within the new framework.

16. Funding: The Scottish National Party Manifesto for the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections contained the following "We value our commitments to the world's most vulnerable nations. We will increase the £15 million International Development Fund by at least 25% by the end of the next Parliament. This will be in addition to the continuation and growth of our Climate Justice Fund and the creation of an 'aid match' scheme with SCIAF". Members may wish to explore with the Minister current and future funding planned for its work on international development. This could include discussion of plans for the use of competitive versus non-competitive funding, and how it ensures transparency, accountability and value for money.

**Clerks to the Committee
August 2026**

Annexe D: Correspondence from the Minister for Equalities and International Development

Patrick Harvie MSP
Convener
Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee
Scottish Parliament

26 August 2026

Dear Patrick,

Please find enclosed a summary of the International Development portfolio priorities to support the Committee's consideration of matters relating to External Affairs on 1st September. This material accompanies the separate submission from Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Energy, Stephen Gethins.

I look forward to further discussion of these matters with the Committee next week.

Yours sincerely

SIMITA KUMAR

International Development

For more than 20 years, Scotland's International Development Programme has focused on long-term partnerships, supporting work across health, education, equalities, renewable energy, and economic development. Founded on partnership, solidarity and locally led development, this approach has demonstrated the value of sustained collaboration in strengthening communities, institutions and opportunities. Our international development work includes partnerships with Malawi, Zambia, Rwanda and Pakistan.

Key achievements under the International Development Fund to date include:

- The graduation of the first-ever home-grown dentists in Malawi through the MalDent project - a cohort of 10 in 2025, with a full student body of 179.
- The delivery of thousands of scholarships to remove barriers to education for women and girls.
- Ten years of partnership between the police forces of Malawi, Zambia and Scotland to tackle violence against women and children.
- The Humanitarian Emergency Fund providing £18 million since 2017 to provide life-saving assistance in 27 countries, including the Middle East, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Sudan and most recently via the Disaster Emergency Committee appeal for the earthquakes in Venezuela.
- Through the Scottish Peace Programme, we also continue to recognise the important role of women peacebuilders in conflict prevention and resolution, and we have supported over 360 fellows from 40 countries and regions as part of the Women in Conflict 1325 Fellowship Programme.

The International Development Programme sits alongside our international climate activity, delivered through the Climate Justice Fund, which is overseen by Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs. The Scottish Government demonstrated its commitment to global solidarity by becoming the first nation to establish a fund dedicated to climate justice outcomes. Launched in 2012, the Climate Justice Fund recognises that those least responsible for climate change are often those most affected by its consequences. Scotland was also the first Global North government to commit funding explicitly to address irreversible loss and damage, which includes slow-onset effects such as sea level rise, and non-economic effects such as the loss of cultural identity. The Scottish Government remains committed to sustaining and increasing the Climate Justice fund, up from £36 million in the last Parliament, in recognition of the increasing threat posed by the changing climate.

Through our International Development Fund in this Parliament, we will continue to support partner led development, advance equality and respond to global challenges. The Scottish Government's budget this year for Scotland's International Development and humanitarian action is £16 million total, up from £12.8 million last year. This Government will introduce an additional 25 per cent increase in the International Development Fund over the course of this Parliament.

The Scottish Government will continue support for tackling global emergencies and conflicts through the Humanitarian Emergency Fund, and give particular focus on

supporting the efforts related to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which recognises the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls.

Scotland will continue to consider ways to directly address humanitarian need in areas of conflict such as Gaza, including donations to the UN-OCHA led Humanitarian Fund for the Occupied Palestinian Territories which provides life-saving health services, ensuring aid reaches those most at risk. And for Gazan children who are identified as needing urgent medical care the Scottish Government will, in partnership with the UK Government, support an additional 10 patients to come to Scotland with their families for medical treatment. This is in addition to the 10 families who arrived last year.

The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring the most effective and innovative approaches are pursued. As we consider the increase in funding, the Scottish Government will review and evaluate existing programmes while developing and implementing new modes of funding and partnership. This will include the development of an aid match scheme that serves to mobilise public support for global solidarity while strengthening locally led responses, working with Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund (SCIAF) and other partner organisations.

By contrast, Scottish Ministers have made clear their concerns regarding the UK Government's planned reductions of Official Development Assistance reductions. The scale of the reductions is particularly stark in Scotland's long-standing partner countries, where bilateral funding is set to fall by up to 90 per cent in Malawi and by more than 80 per cent in both Rwanda and Zambia. At a time when these countries continue to face significant economic, social challenges climate-related challenges, reductions of this scale risk slowing progress towards shared development goals and weakening long-standing partnerships that have delivered positive outcomes over many years. Predictable development support remains essential for stability, resilience and inclusive economic growth.

While the Scottish Government recognise the UK Government's intention to place greater emphasis on investment, technical expertise and systems reform, it remains unclear how these approaches can offset reductions of this scale in direct bilateral support, particularly in countries facing acute fiscal and development pressures. Through Scotland's international development partnerships and commitment to climate justice, we have seen first-hand how debt distress and climate shocks can constrain investment in public services, adaptation and sustainable development. The First Minister has pledged his support for the "Cancel Debt, Choose Hope" campaign in support of finding a fair, long-term solution to the global debt crisis. And the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Rural Affairs has written to the UK Government to ask that it advocates strongly to advance international dialogue on debt justice and debt sustainability, particularly recognising the link that this has with the ability for countries to fund efforts to adapt to increasing climate impacts, during the United Kingdom's G20 Presidency.

Alongside its sustained commitment abroad across international development, humanitarian and climate justice, the Scottish Government continues to invest at home in strengthening global solidarity through support for civil society, education, public engagement and ethical global citizenship. This includes core funding for four networking bodies (three in Scotland and one in Malawi), which play a vital role in

building connections, sharing learning and strengthening collaboration across Scotland's international development sector. It also includes investment in Global Citizenship Education to help equip learners and educators with the knowledge and skills to engage with global challenges.

The Scottish Government recently launched the Global Solidarity Fund which further strengthens the agenda by supporting small organisations, community groups and grassroots initiatives to build capacity, support locally led development, and engage people across Scotland in shared global issues. Taken together, these investments help build public understanding and support for international development and strengthen Scotland's contribution to global citizenship.

The summary information above aims to support the public understanding of the International Development, Humanitarian and Climate Justice programmes which demonstrate the Scottish Government's commitment to standing in solidarity with our partners around the world to address common challenges and promote sustainable development, equality and global justice.