

The African Union's blue strategy

Harnessing ocean resources in a sustainable manner is the 'new frontier of the African renaissance', according to the African Union. To this end, the African Union has designed an ambitious maritime strategy aimed at restoring ocean health, reinstating security at sea, and strengthening strategic 'blue growth' sectors. The EU is supporting this strategy, which is in line with the main aspects of its own approach to the Africa-EU partnership.

Africa's oceans: huge potential at risk

Of the 54 African states, 38 have a coastal border. Together they total 48 000 km of coastline and 13 million km² of maritime zones. Marine resources are a significant asset for Africa. The [seabed](#) offers a biological and mineral diversity favouring mining, cosmetics and pharmaceutical research. [Coastal tourism](#) is an income-generating activity, but to varying degrees depending on the country. As for the [fisheries](#) sector, it is estimated that over 12 million Africans work as fishermen, in fish farms, or in the fish-processing industry. African countries with higher per-capita fish intake are less threatened by [food insecurity](#). [Landlocked countries](#) are also highly dependent on [access to oceans](#), as 90 % of African trade uses seaways. Yet, African countries do not fully benefit from their marine resources, mainly because of insufficient **investment capacities**. [Foreign-flagged vessels](#) transport 95 % of Africa's cargo trade. [African port infrastructure](#) is ill-adapted to global shipping lines' needs: for example, the dwell time – i.e. the time for a container to be taken in charge – is on average more than [twice as long](#) as in ports on other continents. The lack of industrial facilities hinders the exploitation of marine resources: no African state is engaged in [deep seabed exploration](#). **Managing resources sustainably** also needs more investment and [better monitoring](#), as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) as well as unregulated [deep sea](#) and [sand](#) mining [deprive](#) African countries of revenues. What is more, they also render the **ocean's biodiversity** even more fragile, a problem that is aggravated by the catastrophic consequences of [climate change](#): acidification, warming, and rising water levels. Conflicts over [access to fish stocks](#), both those in decline and those in abundance, and [piracy](#) also affect coastal populations' food security. **Fisheries policies** overlook [small-scale fisheries](#), which are crucial for the [livelihoods](#) of whole communities but are affected by declining stocks. Meanwhile, non-African countries catch at least [25 %](#) of all fish in African waters. All those issues are compounded by the fact that the number of people whose lives depend on the maritime domain – be it for money or protein intake – will grow considerably, as the sub-Saharan African population is set to double, rising to [2.5 billion](#) by 2050. This will put the oceans under unbearable strain if the 'business as usual' model is not challenged.

African Union integrated maritime strategy: better coordination needed

At **global level**, the need to improve the way oceans are exploited and protected, while upholding sovereignty, is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea ([UNCLOS](#)). In [2017](#), UN member states renewed their 2015 commitment to sustainable development of the oceans ([sustainable development goal 14](#)). The **African Union** (AU) [adopted](#) the 2050 AIM Strategy ([Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy](#)) in 2014 to [coordinate](#) the maritime policies of African Union members and African regional economic communities in strategic sectors such as knowledge and protection of the ocean space, transport, shipbuilding, energy, aquaculture, and marine law enforcement. In 2015, it was embedded in the African Union's [Agenda 2063](#) as a [priority goal](#) for Africa's inclusive growth and sustainable development. In 2016, on signing the [Lomé Charter on Maritime Security, Safety and Development](#), AU members committed to reinforcing security at sea, one of the main obstacles to achieving blue growth. Most of the 12 AIM Strategy goals **require cooperation and exchange of information** between countries. Examples include ensuring security and safety of shipping; preventing and prosecuting sea crimes; managing environmental protection; improving coastal management and ultimately establishing a 'combined exclusive maritime zone of Africa' (CEMZA). However, disagreements between states over [maritime borders](#) hinder the sharing of information. A first step in overcoming this obstacle would be to adopt a dispute resolution [mechanism](#), but the Lomé

conference failed to [agree](#) on such an instrument. To reduce **dependence on foreign stakeholders**, the AIM Strategy is proposing [cabotage laws](#) treating foreign-flagged vessels more coercively, but according to the UN body for trade and development (UNCTAD) this could prevent African liner shipping companies from [adapting to competition](#). It could also hamper cooperation with partners on whom Africa depends for both trade and security, such as [China](#) and the EU. The adoption of an [African continental free trade agreement](#) by four fifths of AU members might lend new impetus to the integrated maritime strategy, by removing tariff obstacles and increasing seaborne trade.

Africa-EU maritime cooperation: beyond migration and security

The EU has its own [blue strategy](#) to ensure that Member States' maritime policies are consistent with each other. Although it is mostly EU-centred, it has an [international dimension](#) to promote EU views on the fight against IUU and piracy and on sustainable maritime development.

Sea basin cooperation

The EU shares Africa's three sea basins: seven EU Member States are coastal states on the [Mediterranean](#), and five on the [Atlantic](#). Some EU [outermost regions](#) and [overseas countries and territories](#) are located in the Indian Ocean. The EU [Mediterranean Sea Basin strategy](#) promotes common projects to improve the way maritime activities are managed with African countries sharing this basin, as part of EU neighbourhood policy. The Atlantic action plan has triggered scientific cooperation with other Atlantic nations, such as [South Africa](#).

Security and migration

There is no specific EU maritime strategy for the Indian Ocean basin, but [maritime issues](#) are key to [EU strategy in the Horn of Africa](#). The EU naval force ([EU NAVFOR Somalia](#)) is active in the region, not only fighting **maritime piracy** and protecting vulnerable vessels, but also monitoring and reporting on illegal fishing. The EU capacity-building mission ([EUCAP Somalia](#)) focuses on Somalia's maritime security. Seas, as direct or transit [routes](#) for **illegal migration** from Africa to Europe, are an important concern for the EU. Another naval force ([EUNAVFOR MED – operation Sophia](#)) operates in the Mediterranean to divert migrant smugglers' vessels. In parallel, since the 2015 [Valletta summit](#), the EU has been engaged in dialogue with African countries and has set up an [Emergency Trust Fund](#) to discourage 'dangerous journeys through land and sea'. The EU and some Member States are also coordinating with African countries of origin or transit to tackle migrant smuggling on the [Horn of Africa](#), [West Africa and Mediterranean](#) migration routes. **Capacity development** in relation to sea border management and sea rescue is part of EU cooperation in crises (EUBAM in [Libya](#)) and of preventive action (mobility partnership with [Cape Verde](#)). The [ACP-EU Assembly](#) and [NGOs](#) are calling for a focus on increasing **legal means of entry** rather than on deterrence.

The **European Parliament** [supports](#) maritime cooperation provided the EU helps to address the root causes of migration and insecurity at sea. It also has called for [stricter controls](#) on the quality and origin of imported fisheries products.

Trade and fisheries

The EU has concluded [sustainable fisheries partnership agreements](#) with 15 African countries (not all in force yet); these agreements allow EU vessels to fish the surplus of specific species in the partner country's exclusive economic zone ([EEZ](#)). A financial contribution and [support for sustainable fisheries](#) offsets this fishing permit. The ACP group of countries has however taken a [critical stance](#) towards these partnerships, considering them unbalanced and questioning the notion of 'surplus'. The impact of economic partnership agreements with the ACP countries as concerns [trade](#) in [sea products](#) and the development of an African marine industry has yet to be assessed.

The future of EU-Africa maritime partnership

The future 'blue' partnership between the EU and Africa will continue to be influenced, in part at least, by the EU agenda on migration. Cooperation projects on [maritime security](#) are closely linked to coastal border control, while investment aimed at fostering [scientific cooperation](#) and innovation for sustainable blue growth in Africa – addressing climate change and other root causes of migration – are high on the agenda of the [new 'Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs'](#) launched by the Commission in September 2018.

This paper updates an earlier 'at a glance' note, '[A maritime strategy for Africa](#)', published in July 2017.

