

A maritime strategy for Africa

Harnessing the oceans' resources in a sustainable manner is the 'new frontier of the African renaissance', according to the African Union (AU). This 'blue growth' will only materialise if the oceans' health and security at sea are restored. For this purpose, the AU has designed an ambitious maritime strategy, but disagreements among the African states are hampering its realisation. The EU could support this strategy, provided cooperation goes beyond security and migration aspects.

Africa's oceans: a huge potential at risk

Of the 54 African states, 38 have a coastal border. Together they total 48 000 km of coasts and 13 million km² of maritime zones. [Landlocked countries](#) are also highly dependent on lakes (240 000 km²), on rivers, and on access to the oceans. Some 90 % of African trade is done by sea. The seabed offers a biological and mineral [diversity](#) that favours mining, cosmetics and pharmaceutical research and development. [Coastal tourism](#) is an income-generating activity, although at varying levels, 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 a higher per-capita fish intake are less threatened by [food insecurity](#).

Evidently, marine resources are a significant asset for African countries, yet they cannot fully benefit from them for a number of reasons. For instance, they are highly dependent on foreign operators: **foreign-flagged vessels** transport [95 %](#) of Africa's cargo trade and catch at least [25 %](#) of all fish in African waters. **Small-scale fisheries**, which, despite being low-yielding, are crucial for the [livelihoods](#) of whole communities, are frequently [overlooked](#) by fisheries policies. Due to [insufficient investment capacities](#), no African state is engaged in **deep seabed exploration**. Africa lacks competitive **port infrastructure** (the [dwell time](#) – i.e. the time for a container to be taken in charge – is 20 days on average, more than [twice as long](#) as in ports on other continents). The **lack of industrial capacities** hinders the exploitation of marine resources. **Managing resources sustainably** is difficult because of [weak monitoring](#). Consequently, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing ([IUU](#)) as well as unregulated [deep sea](#) and [sand](#) mining [deprive](#) African countries of revenues. Besides, they also render the ocean's biodiversity even more fragile, a problem that is compounded by the catastrophic consequences of [climate change](#): acidification, warming, and rising water levels. Food security is also deeply affected by [piracy](#) and **conflicts** over [access to fish stock](#), both where it is in decline and in abundance. Last but not least, the number of people whose lives depend on the maritime domain, be it for money or protein income, will grow considerably, as the African population is set to double up to [2.5 billion](#) in 2050. This will put the oceans under unbearable strain if the 'business as usual' model is not challenged.

AU integrated maritime strategy: better coordination needed

At the **global level**, the need to better exploit and protect oceans with respect for sovereignty is enshrined in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea ([UNCLOS](#)); in [2017](#), UN member states renewed their 2015 commitment for a sustainable development of the oceans ([SDG 14](#)). Some **African countries**, such as [South Africa](#) and [the Seychelles](#), are already implementing their own 'blue economy' policies – comprehensive development plans based on a sustainable use of the oceans – in strategic sectors such as knowledge and protection of the ocean space, transport, shipbuilding, energy, aquaculture, and marine law enforcement. At **AU level**, the 2012 [Africa's Integrated Marine strategy](#) (AIMS) is designed to coordinate AU members' and African regional economic communities' maritime policies. AIMS is being [implemented](#), albeit at a [slow pace](#): in 2015, it was embedded in the AU's [Agenda 2063](#) as a [priority goal](#) for Africa's inclusive growth and sustainable development; in 2016, on signing the [Lomé Charter](#), 31 AU member states committed to reinforcing security at sea, one of the main obstacles to achieving blue growth. **Cooperation and exchange of information** between states are integrated into most of the 12 AIMS goals. Examples include: ensuring security



and safety of shipping (goal v); preventing and prosecuting sea crimes (goal vii); for managing environmental protection (goal viii); improving coastal management (goal ix) and ultimately establishing a combined exclusive maritime zone of Africa (CEMZA) (goal i). However, sharing of information on maritime security is hindered by disagreements between states – in particular over [maritime borders](#). A first step in overcoming this obstacle would be to adopt a [mechanism](#) for resolving disputes, but the Lomé conference failed to [agree](#) on such an instrument. As for the development of a blue economy that is **less dependent on foreign stakeholders**, the proposed [cabotage laws](#), which treat foreign-flagged vessels more coercively, might be seen as incompatible with [WTO trade facilitation rules](#). This could also hamper cooperation with partners on whom Africa depends for trade but also for security, such as [China](#) and the EU.

Africa-EU maritime cooperation: beyond migration and security

The EU has its own [blue strategy](#) to ensure coherence of Member States' maritime policies. Although it is mostly EU-centred, it has an [external dimension](#) to internationally promote EU views on the fight against IUU and piracy and on sustainable maritime development.

Sea basins cooperation

The EU shares Africa's three sea basins: seven EU Member States are coastal states in the Mediterranean, and five in the Atlantic, and some [overseas countries and territories](#) and [outermost regions](#) are located in the Indian Ocean. The EU [Mediterranean Sea Basin strategy](#) promotes common projects to better manage maritime activities with African countries sharing this basin, in the framework of the European neighbourhood policy. While the [Atlantic action plan](#) does not involve non-EU players, it is seen as capable to 'create a solid foundation for cooperation with other Atlantic nations': for example, [South Africa](#) could join the [\(Trans\)atlantic Ocean Research Alliance](#), which for the time being only includes the EU, the USA and Canada.

Security and migration

There is not a specific EU maritime strategy for the Indian Ocean basin; however, [maritime issues](#) are an essential component of the [EU strategy in the Horn of Africa](#). The EU naval force ([EU NAVFOR Somalia](#)) is active in the region: not only does it fight **against maritime piracy** and protect vulnerable vessels, but it also monitors and reports on illegal fishing. The EU capacity-building mission ([EUCAP Nestor](#)) 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 ([EU NAVFOR Med](#)) operates [in the Mediterranean](#) to divert migrant smugglers' vessels. In parallel, since the 2015 [Valletta summit](#), the EU has engaged in a 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 rescue at sea are part of the EU's cooperation in crisis situations (EUBAM in [Libya](#)) or in preventive actions (Mobility Partnership with [Cape Verde](#)). The [ACP-EU Assembly](#) and [NGOs](#) have called for more legal ways of entry rather than deterrence.

The **European Parliament** often reiterates that development cooperation should not be driven by [migration](#) and [security](#) objectives. It also stresses that [sustainable fisheries](#) should help reduce food waste.

Trade and fisheries

The EU has concluded [sustainable fisheries partnership agreements](#) with 15 African countries (not all yet in force); these agreements allow EU vessels to fish the surplus of specific species in the partner country's exclusive economic zone ([EEZ](#)). This right is offset by a financial contribution that includes [sustainable fisheries development](#) support. The ACP group of countries has however taken a [critical stance](#) towards these partnerships, as it considers them unbalanced and the notion of 'surplus' questionable. As concerns the [trade](#) of [sea products](#) or the development of an African marine industry, the impact of the economic partnership agreements with ACP countries is yet to be assessed.

The future of EU-Africa maritime partnership

Maritime security is one of the [flagships](#) – a nautical term – in support of the EU-Africa partnership, as identified by the European Commission and the European External Action Service in May 2017; other flagships also highlight responsible investments aimed at fostering blue growth. Already, there are several EU-AU scientific cooperation projects that are focused on [ocean or water management](#).

For more information, check the [EPRS selection of resources](#) on the topic.