



AFRICA

EU Cooperation with African countries and the African Union (AU) is based on two distinct frameworks: namely (a) the Partnership Agreements with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states and (b) the Joint Africa-EU strategy. The Partnership Agreement, which was signed in Cotonou (Benin) in 2000 between the EU and the ACP States and which has formed the legal foundation of the political, economic and development dimensions of the partnership for over 20 years, is in the process of being replaced by a completely new agreement that was signed in Samoa on 15 November 2023. Originally, the Cotonou Agreement was due to expire at the end of 2020, but it has been extended, most recently until December 2023, as the signature of a new agreement, negotiated to modernise and upgrade the partnership was blocked in the Council of the EU for several years.

The Joint Africa-EU strategy has been implemented through multiannual roadmaps and action plans adopted at each Africa-EU summit. At the last [EU-AU summit](#) held in February 2022 in Brussels, EU and African leaders agreed on a joint vision for a renewed partnership based on solidarity, security, peace, sustainable development and shared prosperity.

The EU is Africa's biggest donor of development assistance, which is provided through the [Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument \(NDICI\) – Global Europe](#).

In her State of the Union speech in September 2023, Commission President von der Leyen announced that the EU should develop a 'mutually beneficial partnership which focuses on common issues for Europe and Africa' and work on a new strategic approach with Africa.

LEGAL BASIS

- Articles 217 and 218 of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) (TFEU);
- The Cotonou Partnership Agreement between the ACP States and the European Community and its Member States (Cotonou Agreement) – to be replaced by the Samoa Partnership Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and the Members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), of the other part from January 2024 onwards;
- Regulation (EU) 2021/947 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe.



THE ACP-EU PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

Relations between the EU and sub-Saharan Africa have been underpinned in particular by the Cotonou Agreement, which set out the basis for relations between the EU and the 79 countries forming the OACPS.

The Cotonou Agreement was signed in 2000 and was due to expire in 2020, but it has been extended several times, with the latest extension running until 31 December 2023. The Cotonou Agreement's key objective was to contribute to the eradication of poverty and to promote the integration of ACP countries into the world economy. The agreement was structured in three pillars (political, development, economic and trade cooperation) and was implemented by joint ACP-EU institutions, including a Council of Ministers, a Committee of Ambassadors and a Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

The negotiations on the post-Cotonou agreement between the EU and the OACPS were concluded in December 2020, but signature of the new agreement only took place in November 2023, due to internal EU disagreements on the nature of the new agreement and reservations from two EU Member States. The new Partnership Agreement sets out strategic priority areas for cooperation, including human rights, democracy and governance; peace and security; human and social development; environmental sustainability and climate change; inclusive sustainable economic growth and development; and migration and mobility. The new agreement, often referred to as the 'post-Cotonou agreement', also stresses the relevance of cooperation in international forums, and of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Cooperation is structured in three regional protocols reflecting the different priorities of the ACP regions. The EU-Africa Protocol has become the key legal framework for relations between the EU and sub-Saharan Africa. The protocol also assigns a greater role to dialogue and cooperation with the AU. The regional priority areas encompass inclusive and sustainable economic growth; human and social development; the environment and natural resources; peace and security; the rule of law, justice, democracy and governance; human rights and gender equality; and migration and mobility.

The new Samoa Partnership Agreement provides for joint institutions, in particular an OACPS-EU Council of Ministers and four inter-parliamentary assemblies, comprising an umbrella OACPS-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and three regional parliamentary assemblies (Africa-EU, Caribbean-EU and Pacific-EU) (see the briefing by the European Parliamentary Research Service entitled '[After Cotonou: towards a new agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific states](#)'). As of November 2023, the constitutive meetings of the four assemblies are planned to take place in February 2024 in Luanda, Angola. Each of the four assemblies will hold one ordinary annual meeting, which will rotate between an EU and an ACP venue. The regional assemblies may also hold additional meetings in conjunction with the annual OACPS-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly.



THE JOINT AFRICA-EU STRATEGY

The initial Joint Africa-EU strategy was adopted by European and African leaders at the second EU-Africa summit (in Lisbon in 2007) and defined the political vision for the Africa-EU partnership. Its goals are:

- To move beyond donor-recipient cooperation, opening Africa-EU relations to issues of joint political concern;
- To expand cooperation by addressing global common challenges such as migration, climate change, peace and security and to reinforce cooperation in international forums;
- To support Africa's aspirations to encourage trans-regional and continental responses to these significant challenges;
- To work towards a people-centred partnership, ensuring better participation of African and European citizens.

Ahead of the most recent (sixth) EU-AU summit, the Commission and the European External Action Service issued a communication entitled '[Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa](#)'. It proposes enhanced cooperation revolving around five pillars: the green transition and energy access; the digital transformation; sustainable growth and jobs; peace and governance; and migration and mobility. On 25 March 2021, Parliament adopted a '[resolution](#) on a new EU-Africa Strategy – a partnership for sustainable and inclusive development'. Parliament's resolution echoed and reinforced parts of the proposed strategy, such as sustainable and inclusive growth, while calling for increased focus on others, such as human development, social inclusion, human rights, the empowerment of women and young people, and resilient agriculture. On migration, the resolution considered that the success of the partnership would depend on significant improvements in mobility opportunities and called for legal migration channels to be further developed.

At the sixth EU-AU summit (Brussels, 17-18 February 2022) EU and AU heads of state and government agreed on a '[joint vision for a renewed partnership](#)' 'promoting our common priorities, shared values, international law, and preserving together our interests and common public goods. This includes inter alia: the security and prosperity of our citizens, the protection of human rights for all, gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres of life, respect for democratic principles, good governance and the rule of law, actions to preserve the climate, environment and biodiversity, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, the fight against inequalities, support for children's rights, and the inclusion of women, young people and the most disadvantaged'. At the summit, an Africa-Europe Investment Package of EUR 150 billion was agreed on with the aim of promoting diversified, sustainable and resilient economies.



DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The EU and its Member States remain Africa's most significant donor of official development assistance.

As a result of the negotiations on the new 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework (see separate fact sheet [1.4.3](#) 'Multiannual financial framework'), development cooperation is covered by the comprehensive NDICI – Global Europe, fully incorporated into the EU budget. Previously, most of development assistance to African countries was provided from the European Development Fund, which was separate from the EU budget.

The NDICI – Global Europe brings together 10 separate instruments and funds from the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework, as well as the European Development Fund. It has an overall budget of EUR 79.5 billion (in 2020 prices) and is made up of three main components: geographical, thematic and rapid response. The largest share, reserved for the geographical component, is worth EUR 60.4 billion and almost half of it is earmarked for Africa.

TRADE RELATIONS

The Cotonou Agreement allowed the EU and ACP countries to negotiate development-oriented free trade agreements called Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). Trade between the EU and African countries – together with regional and continental economic integration – is considered a fundamental element to promote sustainable development in Africa. In addition, unilateral schemes allow preferential market access to the EU for most sub-Saharan countries (see separate fact sheet [5.2.3](#) 'Trade regimes applicable to developing countries'). The principal instruments promoting trade between the EU and African regions are the EPAs, which are considered to be fully compatible with World Trade Organization rules. However, the negotiation of these EPAs, which started in 2002, has proven more difficult than expected and has been met with considerable resistance from some African governments, local civil society representatives and trade unions. Therefore several EPAs, which were meant to cover entire African regions, are only being provisionally applied with countries willing to do so, such as Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon, and Kenya (for more information, see the European Parliamentary Research Service briefing entitled '[EU economic partnership agreements with ACP countries](#)').

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The conclusion of the Samoa Agreement legally requires the consent of Parliament (Article 218 TFEU), although the agreement can be partially and provisionally applied before consent is given and before the Member States have ratified it. Parliament's consent is also required for any EPA concluded with ACP countries. In addition, Parliament has actively contributed to shaping the new NDICI – Global Europe financial instrument and is overseeing its implementation.



Parliament has several standing inter-parliamentary delegations for relations with African countries and institutions. The principal body in which Parliament cooperates on such matters has been the [ACP–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly](#), composed of Members of the European Parliament and members of parliament from the ACP States, which plays a fundamental role in strengthening parliamentary relations between the EU and its ACP partners under Article 14 of the Cotonou Agreement. Besides the new regional parliamentary assemblies, one of Parliament’s key demands during the negotiations was maintaining a Joint Parliamentary Assembly in the new agreement, which it considered to be a *conditio sine qua non* for its consent.

Parliament has also developed forms of parliamentary cooperation with the AU through its [Delegation for Relations with the Pan-African Parliament](#), established in 2009. Parliamentary summits typically accompany the intergovernmental ones, with parliamentary summits issuing a joint declaration directly to the heads of state or government at the beginning of each intergovernmental summit.

The EU also has privileged parliamentary relations with [South Africa](#), which were strengthened in 2007 by the [EU-South Africa Strategic Partnership](#) - the EU’s only bilateral strategic partnership with an African country. This is also reflected by Parliament’s dedicated standing [Delegation for relations with South Africa](#).

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