

The ocean plays a significant role in maintaining geopolitical balance, global supply chains, and addressing socio-economic, environmental, and governance challenges. The blue economy is a significant and growing component of African and European economies. Africa places a premium on the potential value of the blue economy in its growth trajectory as it generated a value of USD 296 billion in 2022, with projections of USD 576 billion in 2063. The EU also sees it as a key economic growth driver. In 2021, the European blue economy employed 3.6 million people, had a turnover of an estimated 624 billion Euros, and contributed to 171 billion Euros in gross value added (GVA).

Despite this, references to ocean governance and the blue economy have been absent from the main conclusions of the 6th Summit of EU and AU Heads of State and Government held in February 2022, highlighting a missed opportunity for enhancing cooperation in this strategic domain. Moreover, degraded marine, coastal, and freshwater habitats across Africa and Europe call for joint efforts to protect the ecosystem services that underpin the blue economy.

Only recently have the African Union and the European Union begun to increasingly recognize the ocean's potential and the need for global action to harness it. The EU Comprehensive Strategy with Africa adopted in March 2020, the EU's Communication on International Ocean Governance and a new approach for a sustainable blue economy, and the recently adopted (2024) AU's Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYMP) point to the need to increase investments in ocean governance, sustainable fisheries and the blue economy, identifying this as a strategic area of cooperation between Africa and Europe.

Leveraging the momentum of the recently published October 2024 "Roadmap Towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership", Africa and Europe should prioritize the following:

- facilitating more ratifications to operationalize key international agreements,
- enhancing cross-continental networks for sharing policy, research, and data, and
- exploring innovative financing mechanisms such as payment-for-ecosystem services (PES) schemes and natural capital compensation to support sustainable blue economy.

## INTRODUCTION

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The waters surrounding Africa and Europe, with over 100,000 kilometres of coastline, are some of the world's most productive oceanic areas, connecting the continents through trade, investment and cultural exchanges thus, offering a unique opportunity to work jointly in shaping the global ocean landscape.

To this day, coastal tourism, oil and gas, mineral, and blue carbon in Africa are expected to provide significant added value to the future blue economy, whereas fisheries, marine transport, and coastal tourism will create the most employment. With the next EU-AU political cycle, and as the AU embarked on its Second Ten-

Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063, 2024 and 2025 are poised to be a pivotal for international ocean treaties and to meet global challenges.

As the two continents are eyeing 2025 as the year for both the 3rd United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) and the 7th AU-EU Heads of State Summit, the health of the ocean is a shared responsibility for Africa and Europe, requiring collaboration to unlock a sustainable blue economy with global impact on trade, food security, and geopolitical relations.

## CONTEXT

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Less than 1% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding is allocated to ocean development internationally, with Sustainable Development Goal 14: Life Below Water being the most underfunded of all SDGs. In 2021, only 0.68% of total SDG financing and 3% of ODA were directed towards it. Insufficient and mismanaged funding poses challenges for nations in facilitating the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources.

A strengthened partnership between Africa and Europe appears of strategic interest, as both continents are faced with similar challenges ranging from climate, biodiversity loss, rising sea levels to the overexploitation of natural resources and illegal fishing.

The Global Gateway investment package is a key mechanism to be leveraged in driving blue economy development, by narrowing the global investment gap worldwide through the allocation of 150 billion Euros of investment to bolstering cooperation with African partners. Although it does not specifically include the development of ocean governance and the blue economy as a priority area, there are 32 flagship projects in its pipeline for sustainable ocean development, with wider support for ocean development in Africa through other regional development organisations.

### **Focus: The Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance**

In 2022, the European Commission Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), in partnership with the African Union Commission called for the establishment of an Africa-Europe Strategy Group on Ocean Governance, to be facilitated by the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF). This action set an unprecedented backdrop for future collaboration between Africa and Europe on ocean governance and the blue economy.

The Strategy Group, composed of experts from Africa and Europe, developed an action plan and policy guide consisting of a “Roadmap Towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership” to operationalise an Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership. Its main recommendation is the implementation of a structured, institutionalised and ambitious Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership.

The Roadmap acknowledges the importance of knowledge-sharing, policy alignment, and joint action. It aims to move beyond traditional, one-sided development aid, and instead advocates for more equitable responsibility and collaborative strategies where both Africa and Europe contribute with solutions.

It is structured around three key development priorities: (1) Ocean Governance, (2) Capacity Sharing, and (3) Finance and Investment. Its various activities help translate these priorities into concrete proposals and initiatives, as well as aligning and harmonising policies for the development of ocean governance and blue economy across Africa and Europe.

On October 10th, 2024, the ‘Roadmap Towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership’ was published as part of the 2nd edition of the Blue Africa Summit in Tangier.

## AU-EU JOINT OBJECTIVES AND AREAS OF ACTION

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The EU has long worked with Africa on ocean issues, recently focusing on ocean governance, the blue economy and maritime security. To achieve desired outcomes in the Africa-Europe partnership, it remains crucial to monitor progress and evaluate the effectiveness of existing initiatives and actions between the two continents.

One of the first mentions of maritime resources at the AU-EU level was at the 5th EU-AU Summit in 2017, where leaders adopted the “Abidjan Declaration” committing to strengthen their cooperation to address the illegal exploitation of natural resources, the impacts of climate change, and maritime security. In January 2019, the first annual EU-African Union Ministerial meeting in Brussels built on this commitment and the joint communiqué highlighted opportunities for collaboration in areas like the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. While the following AU-EU Summit in February 2022 made no reference to ocean governance, both continents agreed on the need to fight and mitigate climate change and improve the delivery of ‘global public goods’.

At the AU level, the blue economy is a key focus in goal 6 of aspiration 1 of the AU's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. Several governance frameworks support Agenda 2063, including the AU's Integrated Maritime Strategy for 2050, which enhances cooperation among AU Member States for realizing the blue economy; the 2014 Policy Framework and Reform Strategy for Fisheries and Aquaculture in Africa; the African Charter on Maritime Security, Safety, and Development); and the Ocean Decade Africa Roadmap, which offers a coordinated approach to monitor UN Ocean Decade priorities in the region.

At the EU level, the 2007 Integrated Maritime Policy provides a coherent governance framework for maritime issues. In 2016, the EU became the first global economic block to develop an International Ocean Governance Agenda, committing to a clean, healthy, and sustainably managed ocean. On 14 June 2022, ahead of the 2nd UN Ocean Conference, the EU adopted an updated International Ocean Governance Agenda, underscoring the EU's strong commitment to ocean preservation.

## PROGRESS HIGHLIGHTS

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- The EU has supported regional ocean governance initiatives, such as the Marine Regions Forum, organised in Tanzania in November 2023. The EU also organises events to connect entrepreneurs with investors in the blue economy: Blue Invest Africa, with a third edition set to occur in 2025 in Togo.
- The EU and Guinea-Bissau have signed a protocol in September 2024 for the implementation of the fisheries partnership agreement, with an €85 million over 5 years, consisting of €17 million per year dedicated to promoting Guinea-Bissau's sustainable fisheries management, control and surveillance capacities and supporting local fishing communities.
- In July 2024, The EU and Cabo Verde have signed a protocol for the implementation of the Fisheries Partnership Agreement) estimated at €3.9 million over a period of 5 years, allowing 56 fishing vessels from EU vessels to access Cabo Verdean waters and supporting sustainable fisheries management and environmental monitoring
- In June 2024, two additional regional programmes were adopted for Central Africa and the Western Indian Ocean for a total of €100 million, focusing on illegal fishing and building on ongoing programmes.
- The European Commission welcomed the agreement on sustainable fisheries reached at Indian Ocean Tuna Commission in May 2024, leading to 11 new conservation and management measures adopted. In May 2024, as part of the European Initiative of the Global Alliance against Climate Change, nearly €5.3 million was mobilized to work towards the establishment of integrated management of coastal zones in Senegal.
- EU announced €3.5 billion worth of commitments to protect the ocean and promote sustainability at Our Ocean Conference in Greece in April 2024, including €45 million to enhance maritime security and safety in the Western Indian Ocean and Gulf of Guinea regions in Africa; Part of €24 million to protect

marine biodiversity and preserve marine ecosystems in the Blue Benguela Current (Southern Africa); €134 million to help African countries develop their blue economy in a sustainable manner. This corresponds to €59 million for Western Africa, €10 million specific programme in Mauritania, promoting the blue economy, eco-friendly fishing systems and strengthen fisheries value chain, €35 million for Mozambique, €30 million for Angola; €7.5 million for the Blue Mediterranean Partnership to support the sustainable development of a blue economy in the Mediterranean region.

- The European Commission has committed € 184 million to support regional ocean programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa to improve ocean governance, promote a sustainable blue economy, and restore marine ecosystems. In November 2023, € 70 million regional programmes were adopted for Western Africa and the Blue Benguela Current.
- The recent Samoa agreement in July 2023 emphasized cooperation on resilience to natural disasters and a framework

for better equipping ACP countries and the EU to face key growing challenges, while the WestMED Initiative showcase successful cooperation and a catalyst for the development of the blue economy. It includes 5 countries from Northern Africa and 5 countries from Southern Europe.

- As part of the EU-Tanzania Partnership a Team Europe initiative on Blue Economy for job creations and climate change adaptation, covering the period 2021-2024, brings together the EU, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Sweden and the EIB, AFD and KfW, with an envelope of €110 million + €30 million in EFSD+ guarantees, fostering policy design, infrastructure investment, and climate adaptation. One can expect other initiatives of this kind to be replicated across the African continent, building on the 30 multi-annual indicative programmes (MIPs) that include ocean-focused actions for Africa.

## Additional examples of cooperation include:

- The Blue Belt Initiative, commencing at COP22 in Morocco, serves as a cooperation tool for enhancing sustainability in the marine fishing sector and developing sustainable fishing techniques, as well as protecting marine biodiversity from 2023-2027. It aims to create job opportunities, improve food security and help mitigate climate change impacts while fostering cooperation among 23 African countries and the EU, with the 3rd High-Level Dialogue taking place at the Blue Africa Summit in October 2024.
- COP27 saw the launch of a Blue Mediterranean Partnership on sustainable blue financing with the Union for the Mediterranean, EIB, KfW and EBRD, aimed at transitioning to a sustainable blue economy in the European Union's Southern Neighbourhood countries and in the Mediterranean region.
- COP28 announced the Blue Mediterranean Partnership with its implementation fund hosted by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, focusing on investments in biodiversity protection, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, reduction of plastic pollution, and sustainable tourism in non-EU Mediterranean countries.
- 15 sustainable fisheries partnership agreements (SFPAs) have been signed between the EU and African national states, COST-Action, SEA-EU, UN Ocean Decade programme, the Great Blue Wall initiative, and political instruments such as the Moroni Declaration on the Blue Economy, the Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change and the Tangier Declaration - all addressing some of the most pressing ocean development and climate change challenges of our time.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### Roadmap Towards 2030: co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership

The momentum for improved ocean governance and a sustainable regenerative blue economy is on the rise. However, given the state of the ocean, it becomes clear that an Africa-Europe partnership on the matter needs to be accelerated.

**The full operationalisation of the “Roadmap Towards 2030: Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership” is a unique opportunity to drive political and financial momentum and coherence ahead of key international policy milestones**, including changes of leadership at the EU/EC and AUC levels in 2024 and 2025 respectively – which can result in impact on a global scale, but require institutions, countries, programmes to engage, collaborate, and contribute as partners.

**The Roadmap and its vision for an Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership underlines the potential of ocean cooperation and blue economy as a route to strengthen AU-EU ties**, especially if underpinned by a strong science-policy interface and evidence-based programming.

**Cooperation and collaboration on ocean governance** holds strategic opportunity for both Africa and Europe to advance the sustainable development agenda, if pursued with honest intent and just implementation. This calls **for joint position and common view to address some of the greatest challenges of our times – from facilitating a greater number of ratifications to secure operationalisation of key international agreements, as well as ongoing multilateral processes** such as the Global Plastics Treaty, the BBNJ Treaty, the Global Biodiversity Framework, the climate and biodiversity COPs, WTO Fisheries, regulations on deep-sea mining, the 7TH AU-EU Summit, and the third UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3) in 2025.

**Capacity-Sharing** is crucial for the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership focusing on **developing cross-continental networks for sharing policy, research and data**. Building new capacities in Africa and Europe requires **leveraging specialist knowledge and expertise, backed by the commitment to data-driven policy making and programming** for addressing the challenges of ocean governance and the development of a sustainable blue economy, including fostering a greater understanding of the ocean and maximising the impact of the Partnership.

The Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership has the potential to **align financial systems with regeneration, and sustainable development goals** through ocean governance and the blue economy, **ensuring that financial flows are directed away from harmful practices to the ocean. Supporting the development of a strong blue entrepreneurship ecosystem** that has the potential to deliver significant impact on the ground (by and for local stakeholders); and **identify and operationalise innovative financing mechanisms with recognised potential** include payment-for-ecosystem services schemes, compensation for natural capital (including debt-for-nature swaps or ocean swaps), blue carbon market, improved allocation of global tax, blue bonds, blue tokens and FinTech, blended finance facility and novel insurance mechanisms.

Co-driving the Africa-Europe Ocean Partnership represents an opportunity for transformative collaboration between the continents with the ambition to achieving continental aspirations, SDGs, as well as addressing the major ocean crises of biodiversity loss, pollution, climate change and declining resources.

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## DISCLAIMER

Information contained in this Ocean Governance Bulletin reflects our state of knowledge as of October 2024 and is based primarily on our strategy group, publicly available data published by regional institutions, mainstream media and think tanks operating across Africa and Europe. The Africa-Europe Foundation invites the feedback and collaborations of all partners and stakeholders interested in AU-EU commitment tracking.

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