



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Implementation of 'Global Ireland: Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025'

Report to Government – Year 1

May 2021

Summary

This report provides an overview of the first full year of implementation of the Government's Africa Strategy. Considerable progress was achieved in 2020 under each of the Strategy's six objectives in spite of the significant challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The election in 2020 of Ireland to the UN Security Council for the 2021-22 term was a stand-out achievement. Ireland led a strong campaign on the African continent, the result of which demonstrated the strength of our long-standing engagement with Africa and the value of our recommitment to this partnership through the Africa Strategy. The Africa Strategy continues to provide a framework for our engagement with African partners and on African issues in 2021-2022 during our term on the UN Security Council.

Significant work was undertaken to expand Ireland's engagement in the Sahel and francophone West Africa in **advancing stronger political partnerships on foot of a (DFA) scoping visit to the region.** Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence, Simon Coveney T.D., appointed a Special Envoy for Francophone Africa and the Sahel for the duration of Ireland's UN Security Council tenure. Minister of State for Overseas Development Aid and Diaspora, Colm Brophy T.D., pledged €4.9m on behalf of Ireland at the Ministerial Roundtable on the Humanitarian Crisis in the Sahel in October and Ireland became an observer member of the Sahel Alliance, an international development cooperation donor coordination platform. Ireland's aim to secure Associate Observer Membership of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries, in which the majority of Member States are African, progressed significantly during 2020 and Minister Coveney submitted the formal application to the CPLP Secretariat on 5 May 2021.



An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin T.D., addressed the United Nations General Assembly on 26 September 2020 © UN Web TV



Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence, Simon Coveney T.D. with EU High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell Fontelles. © European Union

Advancing **peace, security and respect for human rights and the rule of law** became more challenging everywhere as a result of the COVID pandemic. Nevertheless, there were some positive developments in Africa, in which Ireland played a constructive role. Ireland continued to deploy Defence Forces personnel to UN and EU Missions in Africa. The peaceful re-run of an election in Malawi was supported both through advocacy and financially by Ireland, and through an EU election observation process. Ireland took on a leadership role in responding to the outbreak of armed conflict in Tigray in November, establishing a group of likeminded humanitarian donors to coordinate advocacy with the Government of Ethiopia. Minister Coveney initiated dialogue with key regional interlocutors in November 2020 and has continued to provide leadership on the issue. Since joining the UN Security Council, Ireland has worked consistently to ensure a focus on the conflict in Ethiopia, initiating discussions at the Council in February and March, and leading negotiations that led to adoption of a press statement on the situation in Tigray on 22 April - the first time the Council spoke publicly on the crisis. Ireland also supported the implementation of the 2019 Peace Accord in Mozambique and responded to the deteriorating humanitarian and security situation in Cabo Delgado.

Ireland's goods and services exports to Africa in 2019 amounted to €4.85 billion, an increase of 36% on 2018. In April 2020, Ireland was confirmed as a member of the African Development Bank, which will support our work to promote **inclusive economic growth and mutually beneficial trade** with Africa. Ireland increased support for innovation in Irish-African private sector collaboration, including through a pilot catalytic fund to support Irish and South African tech partnerships. Innovative Irish-African partnerships were supported in areas such as the blue economy, through support for the Fisheries Transparency Initiative to advance sustainable fisheries among African Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The National Task Team on Rural Africa reported in November 2020 on Ireland's potential contribution to the transformation of Africa's agri-food and rural economy. Enterprise Ireland continued to develop education partnerships in Africa, promoting Ireland as a study destination for African students. Student numbers from Africa increased over 50% in the 2019-2020 Academic Year to over 1,200 students across 15 HEIs. In addition, the number of Irish Aid Fellowships offered to African students increased by 35% to 100 in 2020-2021, while Fellowships for students from African SIDS were rolled out for the 2021-2022 academic year. The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine and Bord Bia led a trade mission to Algeria and Egypt in February 2020, with 150 B2B meetings for Irish exporters generating over €20 million in business. In June 2020, the IDA welcomed South Africa's largest animation studio to Galway, where the company is expected to create 60 jobs over the next three years.



Minister of State for Overseas Development Aid and the Diaspora, Colm Brophy, T.D., announcing Irish Aid support for COVID-19 vaccines in developing countries. © DFA

Working with our African partners towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals faced an unprecedented challenge as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ireland allocated almost €150 million to the global COVID-19 response in 2020 including a pledge in May 2020 by then Taoiseach Leo Varadkar of €18 million in support of the GAVI Vaccine Alliance. Ireland adapted quickly to ensure that our development cooperation was effectively supporting African countries in their response. The Government, through Irish Aid, reallocated or fast-tracked €70.78 million to support African partners in responding to the health, humanitarian and socio-economic impact of COVID. Across Africa, Ireland played a leadership role in the coordination of the international community's response to COVID-19, including mobilising Irish Health Service Executive expertise in Ethiopia and Mozambique. In spite of the challenges, work continued to advance the objectives of 'A Better World' in Africa through our Embassy programming, our civil society funding and our support for multilateral programmes.

In an address on **EU-Africa relations** to the Institute of International and European Affairs in June 2020, President Michael D. Higgins emphasised the transformative potential of the EU-Africa partnership to address the key global challenges of our time. Significant work was carried out in 2020 in identifying the EU's priorities for a new comprehensive partnership with Africa, including through European Council conclusions in October 2020. Speaking at that meeting, Taoiseach Micheál Martin expressed Ireland's full support for strengthening the EU's strategic engagement to deliver a stronger partnership between the EU and Africa. Ireland worked to ensure coherent approaches across the various EU-Africa frameworks for cooperation, including the process of agreeing a successor to the Cotonou Partnership Agreement and through the new NDICI-Global Europe funding instrument. Ireland's Embassies engaged from an early stage in the work to develop EU programming on the ground under NDICI, including through Team Europe Initiatives. Irish policy priorities are thus reflected in large scale projects bringing transformative impact in partner countries.



President Higgins delivered a speech on 'Europe and Africa: Towards a New Relationship' at the Institute for International and European Affairs (IIEA), 10 June 2020. © President.ie

A strong Team Ireland approach in 2020 saw work continuing on the development of a new flagship Chancery in Nigeria. Work advanced towards the opening of the new Embassy in Morocco in 2021. In response to the COVID crisis, Irish citizens across Africa were supported through consular

assistance and a dedicated COVID-19 Response Fund for Irish Communities Abroad. Communications campaigns on the work of Team Ireland in Africa in May and in September had a combined reach of almost 450,000 social media users.



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Introduction

‘Global Ireland: Ireland's Strategy for Africa to 2025’ was launched in Dublin Castle on 28 November 2019. The Africa Strategy elaborates upon the commitments set out in the Global Ireland 2025 programme to expand Ireland’s engagement in Africa. The Programme for Government of June 2020 reiterated the commitment to implement Global Ireland 2025, with reference to the new Africa Strategy.

The key objectives identified to deliver on the ambition of Global Ireland and the vision for our relationships with Africa are as follows:

- (i) Ireland will build stronger political partnerships with African countries to address national, regional and global challenges.
- (ii) Ireland will promote peace, security, and respect for human rights and the rule of law.
- (iii) Ireland will support inclusive economic growth and deeper trade and investment relations.
- (iv) Ireland will work with African countries in their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, with a particular focus on reaching those furthest behind first.
- (v) Ireland will promote and contribute to a more ambitious and effective EU partnership with Africa.
- (vi) Ireland will pursue a collaborative ‘Team Ireland’ approach across all our work in Africa.



Minister Simon Coveney T.D. with Foreign Minister of Tanzania, Palamagamba John Kabudi, February 2020. ©DFA

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Progress

This report focuses on the progress made in implementing the Africa Strategy in 2020. Considerable progress was achieved under each of the Strategy's six objectives, despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic across our engagement with Africa.

A stand-out achievement in 2020 of our long-standing engagement with Africa, and the recommitment to this partnership through all six objectives of the Africa Strategy, was the **election of Ireland to the UN Security Council** for the 2021-22 term. The Africa Strategy was launched in Dublin Castle to an audience consisting primarily of African Permanent Representatives to the United Nations. With a quarter of votes in the UN General Assembly, African countries were a critical constituency in the campaign for election. Through Presidential and Government engagement; the work of our Embassies and UN Special Envoys in Africa; our work at the UN; our development cooperation programmes; and the track record of Ireland's peacekeepers, missionaries, development and humanitarian workers, and the wider Irish diaspora, Ireland led a strong campaign on the African continent. As a member of the UN Security Council from 2021, engagement with Africa will continue to be of critical importance and the Strategy provides a comprehensive framework for this work.



Minister for Overseas Development Aid and Diaspora, Colm Brophy T.D., marked 60 years of Ireland's diplomatic presence in Africa, September 2020. © DFA

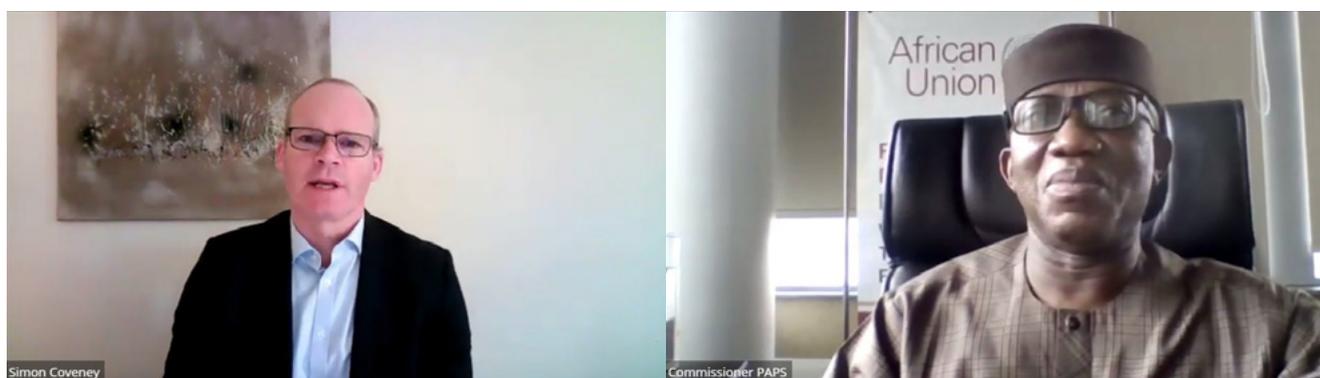
(i) Stronger political partnerships with Africa

Over the lifetime of the Strategy, a series of specific actions, including increased ministerial engagement, are envisaged by which political ties will be enhanced between Ireland and Africa. In parallel, we will seek to work closely with African partners in multilateral forums, particularly the UN, and deepen our engagement with the African Union (AU).

Ministerial engagements and the expansion of our Embassy network and accreditations will continue to serve as the foundation for more comprehensive and coherent engagement bilaterally, regionally and globally with our African partners. Ireland's newest Embassy in Africa was established in Liberia in 2018. Algeria opened an Embassy in Dublin in 2020, with the first resident Ambassador presenting credentials to President Higgins in October.

Although Ministerial travel was not possible for most of 2020, dialogue was maintained through a high number of **bilateral meetings with African partners** over the course of the year, including by VC and telephone. President Michael D. Higgins also engaged actively with a number of his African counterparts in advance of Ireland's election to the UN Security Council.

Engagement with African issues is a key part of our **UN Security Council membership** as some fifty percent of the Council's agenda concerns geographic files focused on Africa. Speaking at the UN General Assembly in September 2020, Taoiseach Micheál Martin took a clear line on the need for UN reform and a strengthening of African voices on the Council, addressing a key priority of African partners. The Department of Foreign Affairs conducted several Ministerial and senior official consultations on UN Security Council agenda items. In April, the then Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Simon Coveney T.D., met the African Group of



Minister Simon Coveney T.D. on an introductory call with the new African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Bankole Adeoye, 12 April 2021. © DFA

Permanent Representatives to the UN to discuss the impact of COVID-19 across Africa and Ireland's partnership with African States. Minister Coveney also engaged with South Africa as an outgoing UN Security Council member, with Tunisia as a current member, and with Kenya as a fellow incoming member with which Ireland will closely engage on the Council. To enhance collaboration with the African Union, three Irish Special Envoys attended the **33rd AU Summit in Addis Ababa** in February 2020. The Envoys succeeded in meeting a total of 27 Presidents and Ministers from 24 African countries. Our engagement with the AU will be further elaborated upon in the sections below.



Ambassador Nicola Brennan presenting credentials to President of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, October 2020. © DFA



Ambassador Lesley Ni Bhriain and Team Ireland during the presentation of credentials to President of Liberia, George Weah, Monrovia, 26 January 2020. © DFA



Irish Delegation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Mali during a scoping visit to the francophone West Africa Region, Bamako, March 2020. © DFA

The Strategy commits Ireland to expand our presence in **francophone West and North Africa**, including through the opening of new Embassies in Morocco and two other locations by 2025. Work advanced towards the opening of a new Embassy in Morocco in 2021. In March 2020, DFA officials conducted a comprehensive scoping visit to the francophone West Africa region in order to identify geographic and sectoral opportunities for Ireland's scaled up engagement in the Sahel and West Africa. Arising from that visit, a suite of recommendations for deeper engagement was approved and work is ongoing on the development of a roadmap to support Ireland's enhanced engagement in the region over the coming five years. A Cross-Department Reference Group was established to support the coordination of this work.

As part of this commitment, Ireland already significantly stepped up its engagement in the Sahel in 2020. The Minister for Foreign Affairs appointed a **Special Envoy for Francophone Africa and the Sahel** for the duration of Ireland's Security Council tenure. In May 2020, Ireland co-

hosted, with the EU Special Representative for the Sahel, the Informal Working Session of EU Special Envoys and Ambassadors for the Sahel. In April 2020, Ireland contributed to the drafting of the joint declaration establishing the Coalition for the Sahel and participated in the first Ministerial Meeting of the Coalition in June 2020 and the follow up Coalition Contact Group meeting in November 2020.



Separately, Ireland also joined, as an observer member, the **Sahel Alliance**, an international development cooperation donor coordination platform, which will form the basis for pillar 4 of the Coalition for the Sahel. Ireland participated in the Steering Committee Meeting of the Sahel Alliance in

November 2020. Also in November 2020, Ireland participated in the 9th Annual Meeting of the **Global Network of the Special Envoys for the Sahel** hosted by the Office of the EU Special Representative for the Sahel and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In October 2020, Minister of State for Overseas Development Aid and Diaspora, Colm Brophy T.D., participated in a **Ministerial Roundtable on the Humanitarian Crisis in the Sahel**, convened by UNOCHA, at which Ireland pledged €4.9 million in 2020.

In line with the Strategy's commitment to increase our capacity to develop regional approaches to areas such as the Horn of Africa, in July 2020, Minister Coveney participated in an **Informal Ministerial discussion on the Horn of Africa**. This virtual event was hosted by the Finnish Foreign Minister, Pekka Haavisto, and included participation by the European Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen; EUSR for the Horn of Africa, Alex Rondos; the UN Under-Secretary General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Rosemary DiCarlo; AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Chergui; and the Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, Workeneh Gebeyehu, as well as other EU Member States.



© DFA

Although the COVID pandemic had a significant impact on plans for **sharing Irish culture** and building cultural collaboration between Ireland and Africa, there were some successes. In 2020, as we marked **40 years of Ireland's diplomatic presence in Zambia**, our Embassy in Zambia created a documentary, in partnership with local institutions, to reflect on the shared history between the two countries. In September 2020, our Embassy in South Africa produced

an online **documentary on Irish missionaries** to raise awareness of the contribution of missionaries to the anti-apartheid struggle, education and healthcare, as well as to engage with the Irish and broader affinity diaspora. Our Embassies in Sierra Leone and Malawi organised inaugural and **innovative St. Brigid's Day** events drawing on a cross section of influential women from business, the arts, legal and military backgrounds to highlight and advance Ireland's work in empowering women and girls. In Ireland, **Africa Day** had to be celebrated virtually in May 2020 with African communities around the country. Nevertheless, DFA worked with local authorities and community groups to generate a social media campaign around Africa Day with an audience reach of 95,000.



A further commitment under this pillar relates to Ireland's application for Associate Observer membership of the **Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP)** to increase institutional linkages with Portuguese-speaking countries. The majority of CPLP member states are African. Associate Observer membership will build on Ireland's strong political relations, trade relations and long-standing development cooperation partnerships with a number of CPLP Member States, while expanding our links to Portuguese-speaking countries with which Ireland has historically had lower levels of engagement. Ireland's intention to seek Associate Observer membership was lodged on 20 April 2020 and approved by CPLP Ambassadors on 18 June 2020. Following an extensive process of consultation and after receiving input from across Government, Minister Coveney submitted the formal application to the CPLP Secretariat on 5 May 2021. It is expected to be considered at the CPLP Heads of State and Government Summit in Angola in July 2021.

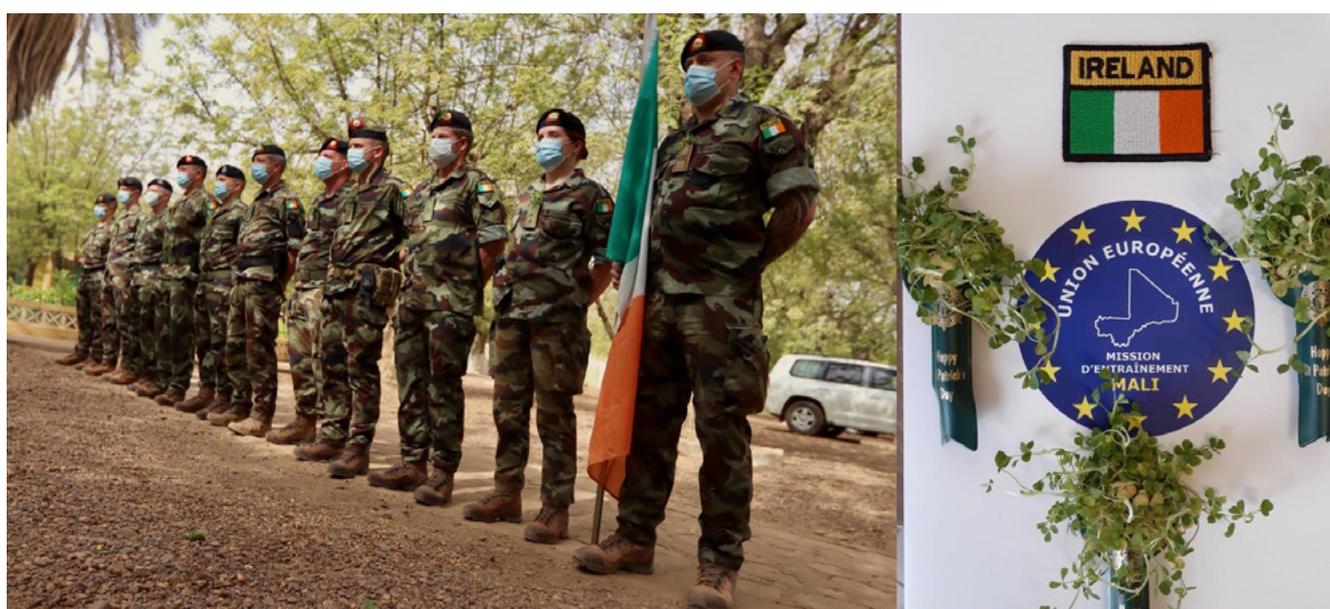
(ii) Peace, security and respect for human rights and the rule of law

Addressing the UN General Assembly in September 2020, Taoiseach Micheál Martin recalled that **peace and security in Africa**, a key focus of the UN Security Council, had been an important priority for Ireland since the deployment of UN peacekeepers to the Congo 60 years earlier. In 2020, Ireland deployed troops to UN peacekeeping missions and to EU CSDP missions in Africa, including to MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo and to the EU Training Mission in Mali. Ireland also funded five experts in civilian CSDP missions in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa and participated in the EU Civilian Missions in Somalia and Niger. The head of the EU's capacity building mission in Somalia is Chris Reynolds, head of the Irish Coast Guard.

In response to the COVID pandemic, Ireland adapted its support for **capacity building and training for African peacekeepers**. Working with Trinity College Dublin, the Department of Foreign Affairs provided funding for free, online Gaming for Peace courses training peacekeepers in Gender Awareness, Cultural Awareness and Communication.

There was significant interest from African countries in these courses, with Nigeria alone registering 150 peacekeepers.

Key to delivering peace on the African continent is a commitment to increase our support for the **conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding work of the AU** and Regional Economic Communities, often the first responders in crisis situations. Ireland will provide €1.5 million over four years between 2019-2022 to support the institutions of the African Union Commission working on peace and security issues, including to the AU Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security. Ireland has channeled some of this funding to support the establishment of the AU Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Centre in Cairo, Egypt. As an elected member of the **UN Peacebuilding Commission** in 2020, Ireland brought its experience of and support for peacebuilding to debates on African issues, drawing on our extensive experience in countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. As an elected member of the UN Security Council, Ireland will work to strengthen co-operation on peace and security issues between the UN and regional organisations, including the AU, as well as trilateral UN-AU-EU cooperation. Ireland will also work with the African members of the Security Council, the A3.



Ireland continued to deploy troops to the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM). © EUTM Mali

Building and sustaining peace in Africa is a key priority of Ireland's engagement as a **UN Security Council member** from January 2021. The current Security Council agenda items related to Africa are: Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Great Lakes Region, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Mali, Sahel, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and Western Sahara. Ethiopia, though not a formal agenda item, has been discussed a number of times. Ireland is chairing the Somalia Sanctions Committee, overseeing implementation of the sanctions regime and support the fragile political situation in Somalia.

Ireland has taken on the role of co-penholder, together with Niger, on the UNOWAS file of the UN Security Council. Our penholder role delivers on our promise to prioritise peace and security in Africa and to work with national and regional African partners during our Security Council tenure. Our key priority as penholder will be to support and facilitate UNOWAS in the implementation of the Office's important

mandate in supporting conflict prevention and peacebuilding in West Africa and the Sahel and promoting democracy and human rights in the region.

A number of the Council's thematic agenda items, including hunger and conflict, climate and security, protection of civilians, Women Peace and Security, and terrorism, are also directly relevant to conflict and post-conflict situations in Africa. Ireland is co-chairing, with Niger, a new Security Council Informal Expert Group on Climate and Security. Ireland is the informal Focal Point on Hunger and Conflict, also with Niger.

In order to enhance Ireland's capacity for analysis and political engagement on crisis situations in Africa, the Department of Foreign Affairs has **strengthened relations with key research organisations** working on African issues. Structured engagement with research organisations took place in the preparations for UN Security Council membership.



Ambassador to the African Union, Nicola Brennan, meeting the African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smail Chergui, Addis Ababa, 5 November 2020. © DFA



Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, Geraldine Byrne Nason, in the Security Council Chamber with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the Permanent Representatives of the other four newly elected UN Security Council members (India, Kenya, Mexico, Norway), January 2021. © DFA

In December 2020, an African research organisation provided training to officials on peace and security issues from the perspective of the African Union. The Department of Foreign Affairs has also engaged an African policy and research organisation to provide technical support services to inform our engagement in the Sahel region. In 2020, the Department of Foreign Affairs **engaged with civil society** in Ireland on UN Security Council peace and security issues through the Stakeholders Forum convened through the Institute for International and European Affairs.

Ireland is committed to **putting women and girls at the heart of what we do** to prevent and resolve conflict in Africa. This is particularly important at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic poses an additional threat to peace processes around the world and is exacerbating inequalities for women and girls. As we commemorated the 20th anniversary in 2020 of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, Ireland delivered statements on its

implementation at open sessions of the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council. These forward-looking statements were based on consultations with women peacebuilders on the challenges facing the WPS agenda, facilitated by our Embassies in Uganda and South Africa. The Department of Foreign Affairs also provided funding for a project to empower grassroots women peace activists in Somalia and Sudan. During the Security Council term, Ireland is serving as co-chair of the Security Council Informal Expert Group on Women, Peace and Security agenda (together with Mexico).

Ireland remains deeply concerned by the ongoing armed conflict between the Federal Government of **Ethiopia** and the former regional authorities in Tigray, which began on 4 November 2020. The conflict has had a devastating impact on the population of Tigray, and poses severe risks to the stability of the wider Horn of Africa region. From the beginning of the Tigray crisis, our Embassy took on a

leadership role in the response, establishing a group of likeminded core humanitarian donors to coordinate advocacy with the Government of Ethiopia. From the outset, Ireland engaged directly as well as actively supported the efforts of the EU, UN and wider international community to address the crisis, including through engagement with the AU. Minister Coveney initiated dialogue with key regional interlocutors in November 2020 and has continued this engagement in 2021. Ireland also worked at an early stage to identify opportunities to provide leadership on this issue as a UN Security Council member and has gone on to play a key role on this file in New York. Ireland has worked consistently to ensure a focus on the conflict in Ethiopia, initiating discussions at the Security Council in February and March, and leading negotiations that led to the adoption of a press statement on the situation in Tigray in April 2021 – the first time the Council spoke publicly on the crisis.

Ireland funds the secondment of an Irish national as Chief of Staff to the EU Special Representative for the Horn of

Africa. This has proven to be an invaluable resource in our understanding of regional developments and an asset in contributing to our ability to respond to peace and security issues in the region. The Horn of Africa remains high on the agenda of the UN Security Council and it will continue to be important for Ireland to maintain a deep level of understanding of this region.

Likewise, in **Mozambique**, home to our second-largest bilateral development cooperation programme, Ireland continues to support the implementation of the 2019 Peace Accord with both financial and technical assistance through the deployment of a member of the Defence Forces. In addition, in response to the deteriorating situation in the north of the country, where a violent insurgency has been underway since 2017, Ireland is actively engaged in humanitarian response efforts in support of more than half a million people displaced from their homes by violence. Ireland's humanitarian assistance amounted to €4.3 million in 2020.



Ireland supports the implementation of the 2019 Peace Accord in Mozambique. © DFA

The promotion and protection of **human rights and the work of civil society** is an important area of engagement with our African partners. There were some notable positive developments in Africa in 2020, such as the banning of female genital mutilation in Sudan and the abolishment of the death penalty in Chad. In Malawi, the courts and civil society, with the support of the military, overturned the results of the 2019 Presidential election through the courts, and organised a successful rerun. Nevertheless, the introduction of public health measures in response to the pandemic posed a challenge in Africa, as elsewhere, for the vital work of human rights defenders and civil society organisations. Over the course of three sessions of the UN Human Rights Council in 2020, Ireland delivered National Statements on Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan, as well as making recommendations to each African country featuring at the Universal Periodic Review, while also delivering statements on thematic issues including freedom of religion and assembly, violence against women, and the human rights of migrants.

There was also a significant impact of the pandemic on **electoral democracy**, with elections delayed in some countries (e.g. Ethiopia) and challenges around election observation in others. Irish Embassy officials participated, together with EU partners, in local fact-checking Diplomatic Watch exercises where this was possible, e.g. during Tanzania's general election in October 2020. However, these local initiatives do not represent a form of professional election observation. The EU suspended full election observation missions for much of 2020 in light of the challenges of the pandemic. The Embassy in Malawi, through its partnership with UNDP, invested in a modern electoral

registration system, was active in the EU election observation process, and engaged in targeted lobbying around the need for a satisfactory conclusion and peaceful political transition in 2020.

Elsewhere in Malawi, our partnership with Irish Rule of Law International focused on improving access to justice for un-represented persons, including minors, accused of crime. This work includes institutional strengthening for the DPP, Ministry of Justice and Malawi's legal aid bureau along with the provision of legal representation often by Irish lawyers to persons held in custody.



Team Ireland in Uganda meeting Uganda's Director of Public Prosecutions, Justice Jane Frances Abodo and her husband, both graduates of Irish Aid's Fellowship Programme. © DFA

(iii) Inclusive economic growth and mutually beneficial trade and investment

The Africa Strategy brings a renewed impetus to expand mutually beneficial trade and investment relations between Ireland and Africa. In 2019, the last year for which figures are available, Ireland exported €1.7 billion in goods (+25% on 2018) and €3.15 billion in services (+42% on 2018) to Africa. Ireland imported €457 million in goods and €518 million in services from Africa in 2019. Total exports by Enterprise Ireland priority markets in Africa were €423 million in 2019 (+17% on 2018). The Enterprise Ireland office in Johannesburg is the hub office for operations in Africa, managing the trade offices in Lagos and Nairobi. Ghana and Ethiopia are two new target countries with niche export opportunities. Enterprise Ireland is exploring market opportunities (particularly in financial technology, aviation services and agriculture) and expanding business networks

in these growing markets. In addition, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment through Enterprise Ireland has invested heavily in the food and beverage sector to support the development of company capability and innovation to ensure the sector is poised to take advantage of emerging opportunities in Africa.

The impact of the COVID pandemic on 2020 trade flows and on the positive trend in increased exports in recent years remains to be seen. The challenges that African countries face in benefiting from global trade are highlighted by the continent's significant imbalance in trade with Ireland. However, through Ireland's membership of the African Development Bank, our support for trade facilitation with African partners and through the World Trade Organisation, and our work, including within the EU, in supporting the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Ireland is working to enable African partners to benefit fully from free and open trade.



Irish Government delegation at the headquarters of the African Development Bank during an official visit in February 2020. © African Development Bank Group

In April 2020, Ireland was officially confirmed as the 81st member of the **African Development Bank**. The Bank plays an important role in fostering sustainable and inclusive social and economic growth and prosperity, helping the African continent to realise its potential. Ireland's membership of the Bank is an investment in this potential and is an important springboard for increased trade and investment opportunities for Irish business. To inform Irish business of these new opportunities, officials from the Department of Finance, Department of Foreign Affairs, Enterprise Ireland and Geosciences Ireland organised an information webinar in November 2020. These agencies will continue to engage with the Bank to promote and facilitate further trade and investment opportunities.

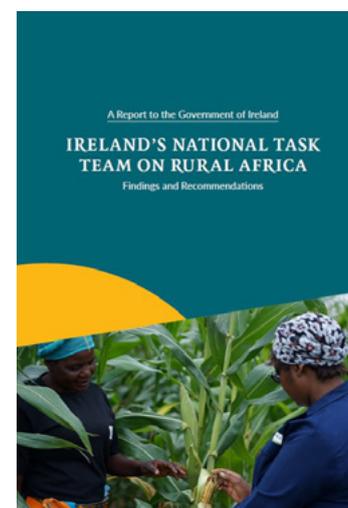


Notwithstanding the current challenges linked to COVID-19, in 2020, Ireland increased support for **innovation in Irish-African private sector collaboration**. The Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine expanded the **Africa Agri-Food Development Programme** enabling Irish agri-food companies to partner with African companies to support sustainable growth of the local food industry and mutual trade. Projects in Ghana, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda were approved for funding under this programme in 2020. The Embassy in South Africa, working with Enterprise Ireland, set up a **pilot catalytic fund to help Irish businesses develop tech partnerships** with entrepreneurs and small businesses in South Africa. The Embassy in Nigeria established a **pilot agri-tech ideation programme** called AgriLab to develop linkages between Irish and Nigerian agri-food companies.



Ireland's support to the World Bank Multi Donor Trust Fund in Ethiopia provides technical assistance to the country's economic reform agenda, including on trade policy for better regional integration and maximising finance for development. Our support prioritises environmental, social, poverty and gender impact monitoring to ensure those furthest behind benefit from the reforms.

In response to the 2019 report of the European Commission's National Task Force on Rural Africa, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine established a **National Task Team on Rural Africa (NTTRA)** in 2020. With the input of stakeholders from Government, the State Agencies, civil society, the private sector, academia and the African diaspora, the NTTRA published a report in November 2020 on Ireland's potential contribution to the transformation of Africa's agri-food and rural economy.



Report of Ireland's National Task Team on Rural Africa, November 2020.

Innovative Irish-African partnerships were also supported in **new areas such as the blue economy and in the digital space**. In 2020, Ireland provided support to the Fisheries Transparency Initiative based in Seychelles, to advance sustainable fisheries practices among African Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Ireland also provided funding to the online Europe-Africa Hackathon initiative to mobilise tech communities in Europe and Africa to jointly find solutions to the problems that COVID-19 has presented. This innovative project seeks to promote inclusive economic growth and digital development in Africa. It was publicised across Africa and Europe, including among Irish third-level institutions and research organisations, and engaged a number of Irish participants.



Ireland-Africa Fellowship Programme candidates at Embassy of Ireland to Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, August 2020. © DFA

In 2019, IDA Ireland established a presence in South Africa with a Pathfinder to complement and support IDA's efforts from Ireland to win new investment from South Africa. This has resulted in two new name investments from South African companies, as well as an expansion project approved by the IDA Board in 2020/2021. Most notably, in June 2020, IDA welcomed South Africa's largest animation studio to Galway, which was the company's first international expansion outside of South Africa. The company is expected to create 60 jobs in Galway over the next three years. There are now 14 South African IDA assisted companies with FDI operations in Ireland, employing over 770 people in key sectors including technology, financial services and life sciences.

Enterprise Ireland is responsible for the promotion of Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) overseas and manages the Education in Ireland national brand. Enterprise Ireland has continued to develop partnerships for the Irish HEIs, promoting Ireland as a study destination for African students. Student numbers from Africa increased over 50% in the 2019-2020 academic year to over 1200 students across 15 HEIs. Market research to assist country understanding has been undertaken in South Africa, Ghana, Tanzania and

Ethiopia. Education in Ireland has also developed a country specific West, East and South Africa approach and ongoing awareness campaigns on social media to promote Ireland as an International Student destination have been undertaken across the three regions. During 2020, over 15 HEIs participated in West and East Africa Education Fairs, with over 12,000 students registered.

With the aim of meeting the Africa Strategy's commitment to double the number of **Fellowships available to African students** to 150 each year by 2025, the number of Fellowships offered to African students increased by 35% to 100 in 2020-21. Fellowships for students from African SIDS were rolled out for the 2021-2022 academic year. Team Ireland continued to promote education partnerships. A postgraduate programme which saw 140 postgraduate students from Algeria commence PhD programmes in the University of Limerick commenced in 2020. **Science Foundation Ireland** continued its support for collaboration between Irish and African institutions and researchers, including in addressing global societal challenges.

A **Trade Mission to Algeria and Egypt** took place in February 2020, attended by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Bord Bia, Sustainable Food Systems Ireland, and a delegation representing the Irish dairy industry and the livestock export sector. This Mission, organised by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and **Bord Bia** supported by the relevant Irish Embassies, expanded market access for Irish livestock exports in the Algerian market. In Egypt, it was agreed that Egyptian inspectors would conduct a systems audit in Irish beef and sheepmeat plants and a proposed veterinary health certificate for sheepmeat was submitted for consideration by Egyptian authorities. Bord Bia's dairy ingredients forum held in Algeria and Egypt attracted 40 buyers, with over 150 B2B meetings with the Irish exporters generating business of over €20 million. The value of Irish dairy ingredients exports to Algeria and Egypt respectively grew by 54% and 8% in 2020.

Also of note is ongoing work to support the implementation of the **African Continental Free Trade Area** and African economic integration. To this end, Ireland has participated in EU expert-level meetings and has provided its perspective on how to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on regional trade and supported effective measures to address this. Ireland continued its work in 2020 to build an enhanced trade environment and increased access to markets through support for the International Trade Centre, the World Trade Organisation Standards and Trade Development Facility, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development Port Management Programme and, specifically in the East African region, through our partnership with Trade Mark East Africa. This support was adapted to respond to the new challenges arising from COVID-19 restrictions, for example, by supporting safe trade zones for women traders at the border between Kenya and Uganda.



*Trade Mission led by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and Bord Bia to Algeria and Egypt, February 2020.
© Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine*

(iv) Work with African Countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

The collective effort of Ireland and our African partners to work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) faced an enormous and unprecedented challenge caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. From the outset of the crisis, Ireland was committed to a multilateral response to the pandemic. President Higgins gave an address on the COVID-19 situation in Africa in April 2020 to the African-European Parliamentarians Initiative, setting out the challenges of tackling the pandemic in Africa and calling for international support to strengthen African capacity to respond. The Taoiseach reaffirmed Ireland's solidarity with Africa on several occasions. In May 2020, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar pledged €18 million in support of the GAVI Vaccine Alliance. Taoiseach Micheál Martin spoke on a number of occasions about Ireland's commitment to the global response to COVID-19, including in his speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2020.



In 2020, funding of almost €140 million was allocated to twelve countries in sub-Saharan Africa to support programmes contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. However, there is already significant evidence that the pandemic has begun to erode the initial progress made towards achieving the SDGs in Africa. Recognising this, Ireland adapted quickly to ensure that our development cooperation was effectively supporting African countries in their response to the pandemic. Our Embassies in Africa reallocated more than €22.6 million of funding to support immediate health and humanitarian responses to COVID-19.

A further €46.3 million was reallocated to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic including the development and roll out of shock-responsive social protection systems.

Through our membership of the African Development Bank, Ireland supported the Africa-wide COVID-19 Response Facility which makes up to USD \$10 billion of funding available to governments and the private sector. The achievement of the SDGs was a driver for membership and will continue to drive and shape our engagement with the African Development Bank. Ireland, both directly and through our Constituency, will support and champion continued provision of finance, technical assistance, policy support and knowledge, while these Goals remain at the heart of the Bank's policy programme.



Panel discussion at Uganda's National Dialogue for Social Protection 2020, organised by Ireland as Chair of Uganda's Social Protection Donor Group. © DFA

Across Africa, Ireland has played a leadership role in the coordination of the international community's response to COVID-19 alongside EU delegations, like-minded donors, and UN Agencies to ensure that donor responses are effective and in line with national Government priorities. In Liberia, for example, Ireland continues to co-chair the Health Donor Group which coordinates the international community's health sector response. In Malawi, Ireland took a lead role advocating for government and donors to mitigate impact of the related economic downturn via flexible cash based social protection mechanisms. In Mozambique, Ireland has been at the forefront in tackling the crisis using the full range of development, diplomatic, and influencing strategies at our disposal to help support the Mozambican Government's own

COVID-19 response. This has included mobilising Irish Health Service Executive expertise. The HSE is also engaging in Ethiopia to help improve quality and safety of care in hospitals and during 2020 the HSE embarked on a new initiative to strengthen psychosocial support for health workers during the pandemic.

In addition to responding to the pandemic, Ireland's Embassies in Africa have continued to work on delivering the priorities identified in Ireland's international development policy, *A Better World*. In 2020, **new multi-annual mission strategies** were approved for Ethiopia, Mozambique and Uganda with a strong focus on reaching the furthest behind and reflecting the policy priorities of gender equality, strengthened governance, climate action and reduced humanitarian need.

Support to civil society represents a core element of the Africa Strategy. Over 70% of Irish Aid **civil society funding** is spent in Africa. In 2020, Irish Aid continued to work closely with a wide range of civil society organisations in Africa making an important contribution to the eradication of poverty, hunger and human rights violations. Ireland allocated over €15 million to Concern to support its work in 13 African countries. Programmes responded promptly to the COVID-19 pandemic in fragile states. Ireland also provided a grant of €2.5 million to

Oxfam to support four African programmes that focused on bringing about greater economic empowerment for poor and marginalised women and youth in Malawi, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. The work also focused on improving community knowledge and attitudes towards eradicating Gender Based Violence (GBV), as well as increasing the number of women in leadership positions. Ireland also allocated €1.8 million to support a number of Sightsavers projects in four West African countries (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Senegal and Cameroon) that focused on eye health and access to education for children with disabilities.

Recognising that **gender equality** is fundamental for sustainable development, Ireland has continued to deepen its investment in tackling gender inequality, increasing funding of organisations working on women's rights and ensuring a stronger focus on gender equality across interventions on health, livelihoods and nutrition. For example, in Tanzania, Ireland's Embassy supports women's rights organisations to build and sustain the country's women's movement. In addition, the Embassy supports innovative approaches to ending GBV and has expanded work on sexual and reproductive health and rights, reaching thousands of adolescents through improved education and access to quality services.



Kwena Mabotja, Africa Director at SAP Next-Gen; Ndoni Mccunu, Founder of Black Women in Science (BWIS); Fionnuala Gilsean, Ambassador of Ireland to South Africa; Naomi Molefe, Founder of Women in Big Data (WiBD), and Mmampei Chaba, Chief Director of Multilateral and Africa at the South African Department of Science and Innovation at an International Women's Day 2020 event on closing the gender gap in Science, Technology and Innovation. © DFA

Ireland's Embassy in Kenya continues to promote opportunities for youth and women through its flagship Young Scientist Kenya Initiative. In Liberia, Ireland's Mission Strategy is supporting a range of elements of the WPS agenda through work on addressing Sexual and Gender Based Violence and increasing women's political participation at all levels. Ireland's Embassies in Africa have been working to ensure that our commitment to gender equality underpins our international development response to COVID-19. They have implemented flexible and adaptive ways of working to ensure continued support for existing programmes that address gender equality and through the development of new interventions that specifically address the gendered impacts on women and girls of COVID-19. This is also reflected in our engagement with the African Development Bank where we co-lead with Sweden in crafting the constituency input to its gender policy programme.



Members of Embassy of Ireland in Tanzania cleaning up one of the local beaches, Tanzania, 12 March 2020. © DFA

In line with the commitments made in A Better World and in the Programme for Government, Ireland is scaling up funding for **climate action** and ensuring that our international engagement and Official Development Assistance (ODA) support climate adaptation and resilience at the local level. In 2020, a **new Climate Unit** was formed within the Development Cooperation and Africa Division of DFA to support Ireland's Climate Diplomacy, including during our tenure on the Security Council. The new Unit will also lead climate finance including work to climate proof all of Ireland's overseas development assistance, and in collaboration with other Government Departments establish a roadmap for doubling the proportion of ODA allocated as climate finance by 2030. Ireland's climate finance, which reached over €93m in 2019, is concentrated in Least Developed Countries in Africa.

In 2020, Ireland joined the Board of LIFE-AR, an initiative owned and led by the Least Developed Country Group in the UNFCCC. Ireland provided €1m in funding for the establishment phase of this initiative, following through on our commitment to the LIFE-AR Partnership Compact signed at the UN Secretary General's Climate Summit in 2019. LIFE-AR will assist LDCs to access and direct more climate finance for adaptation and resilience to community level. 2020 saw Malawi, with support from the Embassy of Ireland in particular, achieve its 7 year goal of getting 2 million energy saving cookstoves into use. Achieving this target has contributed to a slowdown in an otherwise very high rate of deforestation with several other benefits including reduced incidence of respiratory tract infections for women and children.

Ireland provides significant support to **reducing humanitarian need in African countries**. As in previous years, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Sudan were the greatest recipients of Ireland's humanitarian assistance respectively, due to the protracted crises there. Additional funding was provided to partners operating in central Sahel, given the deteriorating situation there and increased political engagement by the European Union. Ireland also increased funding to partners providing safe spaces and specialised services to highly vulnerable displaced/refugee women and girls living in five African countries (Ethiopia, South Sudan, Somalia, Kenya and Cameroon). In July 2020, Ireland assumed a seat on the Somalia Humanitarian Fund's Advisory Board.



Ireland signed the Kwon-Gesh Pledge and committed to including youth in policy-making regarding climate action, New York, December 2019. © DFA

(v) A more ambitious EU partnership with Africa

Complementary to Ireland's bilateral relations with Africa, the Strategy places a particular focus on the importance of Ireland's EU membership in facilitating deeper relationships with African countries. 2020 was expected to be a key year for EU-Africa relations, setting the agenda for the strategic partnership between the two continents for the coming years. Due to the impact of COVID-19, progress in advancing the EU-Africa partnership was delayed and a number of political level EU-Africa meetings were postponed, including the triennial EU-AU Summit.

Despite the delays, significant work was carried out in 2020 within the EU in identifying the EU's priorities for a new comprehensive partnership with Africa. In an address on **EU-Africa relations** to the Institute of International and European Affairs in June 2020, President Michael D. Higgins emphasised the transformative potential of the EU-Africa partnership to address the key global challenges of our time. The future of



The EU's new comprehensive strategy towards Africa was launched in March 2020. © European Union, 2020

EU-AU relations, and the EU's new comprehensive strategy towards Africa, were discussed at the European Council in October 2020, at three Foreign Affairs Councils, at two meetings of EU Development Ministers, at five COREPER II meetings, four Peace and Security Council meetings and several times at the Africa Working Group (COAFR). Ireland actively participated in these discussions and in the negotiations of Council and European Council Conclusions on Africa in June



On 29 September, Minister for Overseas Development Aid & Diaspora, Colm Brophy T.D., participated in an informal video conference of the EU Foreign Affairs Council in the format of Development Ministers, focusing on relations with Africa and EU-ACP Post-Cotonou negotiations. © eu2020de

and October 2020 respectively, ensuring that our priorities for EU-AU relations were reflected in the final conclusions. At the European Council on 15/16 October, Taoiseach Micheál Martin expressed Ireland's full support for strengthening the EU's strategic engagement to deliver a stronger partnership between the EU and Africa.

Ireland has strong partnerships across Africa and has supported a **coordinated Team Europe approach to engagement with African partners** to determine joint priorities in advance of the next EU-AU Summit. Ministers and officials engaged with EU Member States on EU-Africa relations and African issues, including with Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, and Portugal. In the case of Finland and Estonia, both developing Africa Strategies in 2020, officials shared Ireland's experience of developing and implementing a strategy for Africa.



Taoiseach Micheál Martin T.D. at the European Council on 15/16 October after discussions with European leaders on the EU-Africa partnership.
© European Union

Ireland worked to ensure coordinated and coherent approaches across the various EU-Africa frameworks for cooperation, including in the process of agreeing a **successor to the Cotonou Partnership Agreement** with the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States and through the new and streamlined funding instrument within the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-27 - the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). NDICI includes funding of at least €26 billion for sub-Saharan Africa, and €17.2 billion for the Neighbourhood which includes a number of North African countries. Ireland's Embassies in Africa also engaged from an early stage in the work to develop EU programming on the ground under NDICI, including by establishing **Team Europe Initiatives**, which will be large-scale projects that can bring transformative impact

in partner countries. In countries where there are a small number of EU Member States present, such as Liberia, Malawi and Sierra Leone, Ireland plays a particularly important role in agenda setting and representation – both in terms of political dialogue and Team Europe Initiatives.

In addition, Ireland contributed over €15 million to the **EU Trust Fund for Africa** – addressing the root causes of instability, forced displacement and irregular migration and contributing to better migration management. Programmes under the EU Trust Fund continued to be implemented in 2020 in twenty-six partner countries across three regions of Africa: the Sahel and Lake Chad, the Horn of Africa and North Africa.

The **EU-Southern Neighbourhood Ministerial** meeting, which includes Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia, took place on 26 November 2020. The EU progressed the definition of priorities for a renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood in the last quarter of 2020, forming the basis of a Joint Communication from the Commission and High Representative on a renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood published in early 2021.

In 2020, Ireland continued to engage proactively in **EU peace and security activities** in Africa, contributing 20 Defence Forces personnel to the EU Training Mission in Mali and 3 naval personnel to the Operation HQ of Operation IRINI. Ireland also funded 5 experts in civilian CSDP missions in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. Ireland actively engaged in EU negotiations on the establishment of a European Peace Facility that will serve as a mechanism for ongoing EU support for the African Peace and Security Architecture and African-led Peace Support Operations. In order to provide the EU with renewed political impetus and strategic direction to pursue its broad engagement in the Horn of Africa and Sahel regions, Ireland engaged in consultations with EU Member States and EU institutions in the process of revisiting the EU Strategic Framework for these regions, work which concluded in 2021.

The Department of Foreign Affairs maintains ongoing engagement with **civil society partners** to advance Ireland's contribution to the EU-Africa partnership, including through regular policy discussions at official level with Dóchas. In October 2020, the Minister for Foreign Affairs discussed the EU-Africa partnership with civil society at a conference of the Irish Forum for International Agricultural Development.

(vi) A strong Team Ireland approach will increase our impact

To meet the Government's objectives for Ireland's engagement in Africa, the Strategy calls for a strong Team Ireland approach to increase our impact and effectiveness.

The Strategy commits Ireland to expand our presence in Francophone West and North Africa and to open a new Embassy in Morocco and two other locations in the region by 2025. Work advanced in 2020 to open the new Embassy in Morocco in 2021. The Strategy also commits Ireland to opening two new Embassies in West Africa. In 2020, significant work was carried out to scale up our engagement in the region, as set out under the first strategic objective. Following a scoping visit by officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs to Mali, Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire, a set of recommendations was set out to further inform Ireland's deeper engagement in this region.

Work has also continued on the development of a new flagship Chancery in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and Ireland's second-largest export market on the continent. Our expanded footprint in West Africa will provide additional economic and trading opportunities for Irish companies, which to date have been largely untapped. Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy of the West Africa region was poised to expand by 4% in 2020. The outbreak of the pandemic came at a time when West Africa included some of the fastest-growing economies on the continent.

As well as expanding our physical footprint across Africa, the Strategy envisages the ongoing provision of high quality consular assistance to Irish citizens in Africa. In addition, in countries with a small number of EU Member States present, Ireland has provided consular assistance to unrepresented EU citizens as part of a burden share under the Consular Directive. At the height of the COVID-19 crisis when many flights were suddenly cancelled, the Department of Foreign Affairs facilitated the repatriation of several hundred Irish citizens, among them complex consular cases. A special repatriation flight from Nigeria was organised by the Embassy in Abuja. In Liberia, the Embassy facilitated a special ESB

International flight with Ryanair, (which was Ryanair's first to Sub-Saharan Africa) and repatriated Irish, EU and other citizens. The Department's dedicated centre for travel queries related to COVID-19 received a large volume of queries from Irish citizens in African countries. Embassies remained in regular contact with the network of Honorary Consuls in Africa on the impacts of COVID-19 in their countries of accreditation. The Digital Engagement Project for Honorary Consuls is being rolled out in Africa, delivering a centralised information hub for the Honorary Consul Network.



On 28 April 2020, the Embassy of Ireland in Liberia facilitated a special ESB International flight with Ryanair (which was Ryanair's first flight to Sub-Saharan Africa) and repatriated Irish, EU and other citizens.
© FlightRadar24.com

As the scale of the impact of the pandemic on our **Diaspora communities** became clear, the Government established a dedicated COVID-19 Response Fund for Irish Communities abroad in 2020. Funding of €18,500 was provided to the Irish Mashonaland Association to assist with the provision of emergency supplies to elderly and vulnerable members of the Irish Diaspora in Zimbabwe.

Effectively communicating Ireland's work in Africa is an important commitment of the Africa Strategy. In September

2020, the sixtieth anniversary of Ireland's diplomatic presence on the continent was marked by a month-long #IrelandinAfrica social media campaign, reaching over 350,000 users. In May, messaging on Ireland's work in Africa was included in the campaign for the virtual Africa Day, which reached 95,000 users. Also in 2020, a dedicated page on Ireland's work in Africa was created on the DFA website for the first time and was used in both campaigns to generate awareness about Ireland's work in the region.



Study in Ireland Education Fair, Nairobi, Kenya, February 2020. © DFA

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Impact of COVID-19

Described by UNDP as ‘the defining global health crisis of our time’ and the greatest challenge the world has faced since the end of the Second World War, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a new reality for Ireland's partnership with Africa

As a global pandemic, every country is affected by COVID-19 and all have needed assistance. Quickly grasping the severity of the crisis, in February 2020, Ireland was the first country to respond to the WHO COVID-19 appeal, with an initial contribution of €1 million. To date, Ireland has allocated almost €150 million to the global COVID-19 response.

Building on Ireland's strong track record over many years of strengthening healthcare systems across Africa, Ireland took the lead to ensure effective co-ordinated international action to support the COVID-19 response of several African states. Ireland also moved quickly to support African Small Island Developing States in the areas of social protection and food security. Our response to the COVID pandemic in Africa, as elsewhere, was informed by Ireland's commitment to reach the furthest behind first, set out in the international development policy, ‘A Better World’ and reiterated in the Africa Strategy.

The public health and socio-economic crises caused by the pandemic have become central to the agenda of EU-Africa relations and this will remain the case as we prepare for the next EU-African Union Summit. Development Ministers have endorsed a ‘Team Europe’ response globally to COVID-19, with a particular focus on fragile and highly vulnerable countries. The Team Europe package was valued at almost €40.5 billion as of end 2020. ‘Team Europe’ has provided coherence and visibility to the EU's global response and is expected to continue to be a model for EU action in response to COVID, and more broadly in development cooperation.

Fair and equitable access to vaccines against COVID-19 is likely to be a continued focus of African countries in the ongoing response to the pandemic in 2021. In a joint effort between the European Commission and the 27 EU Member States, Team Europe is supporting the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, which is leading efforts to secure fair and equitable access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines in low and middle-income countries.

Calls for debt relief will also be high on the agenda of African partners to support their response to the fiscal and socio-economic impact of the pandemic. Ireland supports the EU's calls for debt relief to speed up post-COVID-19 recovery in the least developed countries. Ireland is not a major

creditor country, but has been supportive of the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative and efforts to provide debt relief through pre-existing mechanisms such as the Paris Club, World Bank, IMF and other Multilateral Development Banks. In this regard, Ireland also supports the Development Committee's call on the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund to review the debt challenges of low-income countries, including from Africa, and propose actions to address their fiscal and debt stress.

As part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations Secretary General in April 2020 directed the suspension of all rotations and leave for military personnel serving in UN missions until June 2020. The UN direction impacted over 100,000 UN uniformed personnel from over 120 countries serving worldwide, including Ireland and Defence Forces personnel serving with UN missions. The suspension was based on the protection of local communities as well as that of the peacekeepers during the COVID pandemic. The exceptional circumstances of the pandemic required that members of the Permanent Defence Force be quarantined in military installations for a two-week period immediately prior to their departure on overseas missions and again on arrival in the mission area to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19. The overall impact in terms of overseas peacekeeping deployments was that, while rotations of Defence Forces personnel to certain missions were delayed, all rotations of Irish personnel were successfully conducted during 2020. Specifically in relation to the deployment of twenty (20) personnel to EUTM Mali mission, seven (7) personnel were temporarily withdrawn from the contingent during April 2020 due to constraints on the provision of training caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Irish deployment was reinstated to twenty (20) personnel in November 2020.

In addition, plans to deploy a mobile training team of Irish Defence Forces instructors to support UN delivery of C-IED training for troops deploying to the MINUSMA mission in Mali had to be suspended due to the UN COVID-19 troop travel restrictions. On hold also was our military training pledges to the UN which had in the recent past provided training and funding support that enabled military and police personnel from Namibia, Togo, Lesotho, Ghana and Niger attend core

peacekeeping courses delivered at the UN Training School in the Curragh, Co. Kildare. It is hoped however that Ireland will be in a position to continue this valuable work, with a particular focus on training UN Peacekeepers for African missions.

The pandemic has impacted on or delayed some areas of Africa Strategy implementation in 2020, such as trade and cultural promotion work, and the convening of a number of EU-Africa meetings. Nevertheless, the Strategy's focus on deepening political partnerships to address regional and global problems, and on strengthening Ireland's contribution to peace, security and sustainable economic growth and development, has been reinforced by the global nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and by its geopolitical and socio-economic consequences. The Strategy remains relevant for Ireland's engagement with African partners and as a global actor, including on the UN Security Council and in our ongoing global response to the COVID pandemic.



Ambassador to Mozambique, Nuala O'Brien, signing an agreement to provide €2.2m towards WFP's humanitarian response in support of internally displaced people in northern Mozambique, 10 December 2020. © DFA



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