

July 2024



Recommendations for the EU's international climate and energy partnerships

Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe is Europe's leading NGO coalition fighting dangerous climate change. With 200 member organisations active in 40 European countries, representing over 1,700 NGOs and more than 40 million citizens, CAN Europe promotes sustainable climate, energy and development policies throughout Europe.

Context

Climate and energy transition partnerships are a critical element of the external dimension of the European Green Deal (EGD) and to globally support more ambitious climate action and a socially just green transition in this critical decade. Entering the new EU policy cycle, ahead of decisive international climate policy years with UNFCCC COP29 and COP30, with the submission of new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in 2025, and amidst escalating devastating climate impacts, is therefore also an important moment to share perspectives on key elements for better harnessing the potential EU climate and energy partnerships with other countries. The European Commission is also said to be working on the release of a new communication on “energy and climate diplomacy”¹ and a “global climate and energy vision” before UNFCCC COP30.

The EU has a wide diplomacy toolbox, from financial instruments (including the EU budget Global Europe Instrument, its climate finance components and more specific initiatives such as the Global Gateway), to its foreign policy institutions (such as the EU External Action Service, EEAS) and in various fields of international policy-making, under the UNFCCC, in relevant energy policy spaces, and beyond. Alongside this multitude of instruments across both EU institutions and member states, there is vast European involvement in international institutions (including powerful weight on the boards of Multilateral Development Banks, diplomatic initiatives and bodies). However, despite this arsenal, the EU is missing many opportunities to coordinate an equitable, just, and globally prosperous climate transition, and to advance lasting strategic partnerships with countries and country groups. Ahead of and during COP28, some new partnerships were formed or additional steps taken within existing partnerships, as CAN Europe analysed.²

This policy brief therefore preserves its focus on key parameters for more specific bilateral and regional **climate and energy partnerships with EU involvement**, but does not speak to all wider aspects of collaborations such as specific trade agreements even though it is clear that EU trade policy too often

¹ to be released by 30 October 2024, according to media reports

² <https://caneurope.org/eu-partnerships-new-impulses-at-cop28/>

restricts or contradicts climate policies.³ But considering these aspects more in detail would go beyond the scope of this briefing. The brief also reflects upon the latest mandates provided for the new EU policy cycle 2024-2029, such as the Strategic Agenda and the Commission President Political Guidelines.

The new Strategic Agenda and green diplomacy

On 27 June, the EU leaders adopted the new Strategic Agenda 2024-2029. Ahead of this, CAN Europe called on the EU to lead by example for climate justice internationally, delivering on its obligations to the Global South - broadly speaking so-called “developing countries” noting their big economic, emissions-wise, cultural and social diversity - honouring commitments to providing and increasing new and additional, in particular grants-based international climate finance in line with its fair share.⁴

In the Strategic Agenda, EU leaders promised to “take the lead in addressing global challenges, championing international law and institutions, fair global governance, inclusive multilateralism and sustainable growth and development” and “to pursue efforts to promote global peace, justice and stability, as well as democracy, universal human rights and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all international fora.”⁵ Although they fell short of specifically articulating their commitment to the continued implementation of the European Green Deal, they did offer it direct and robust support in the context of their determination to succeed in the green transition and reaffirming key policy areas which have been essential elements of the EGD so far, including promoting the energy union through net zero and low-carbon technologies, circular economy, resource efficiency, restoring nature. The Strategic Agenda also states that the next Multiannual Financial Framework for the Union will “have to reflect these priorities, ensuring that the EU budget is fit for the future and that European responses are given to European challenges.”

This follows a call by EU Foreign Ministers to intensify the “EU’s green diplomacy as a political priority through increased coordination, information exchange and cooperation through relevant capital-based networks, including the Green Diplomacy Network (GDN) and the Energy Diplomacy Expert Group, dedicated discussions in relevant geographic and thematic Council Working Groups and at local level.”⁶

Political Guidelines for the 2024-2029 policy cycle and partnerships

In the Political Guidelines for the 2024-2029 policy cycle, presented by Ursula von der Leyen on July 18th as she successfully sought confirmation from the European Parliament for a second mandate as President of the European Commission, she emphasises the EU's need “to remain a leader in international climate negotiations”, pledging to enhance the Union’s green diplomacy and to set out a **global climate and energy vision** ahead of COP30 in 2025. While specific proposals were not detailed,

³ For instance, EU trade agreements facilitate the export of highly polluting cars and chemical products, which do not even have to comply with EU environmental standards when being exported. The transition of agriculture is contradicted by multiple recent trade agreements that keep the EU and its trading partners on the tract of export orientation and specialisation, rather than encouraging them to diversify. Similar aspects can be raised in relation to trade in minerals and resources the EU seeks to obtain.

⁴ [CAN-Europe-Input-Strategic-Agenda-14-June.pdf \(caneurope.org\)](#)

⁵ [2024_557_new-strategic-agenda.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁶ [pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

other parts of the guidelines suggest a significant role for Clean Trade and Investment Partnerships aimed at securing a “supply of raw materials, clean energy and clean tech from across the world”.

Investment in partnerships is also identified as one of the three main pillars of von der Leyen's proposed new economic foreign policy, alongside economic security and trade. The proposal seeks to “take Global Gateway to the next level” by creating “long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships” with countries in the Indo-Pacific, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. These partnerships will focus on investment in infrastructure, trade, and macro-economic support, developed with a “Team Europe approach” involving member states, international financial institutions and private actors.

While not always framed explicitly under a climate and energy context, energy considerations feature prominently in the section of the programme dedicated to such partnerships. For instance, in discussing the deepening of the EU-Africa partnership ahead of the 2025 EU-African Union partnership, the guidelines mention driving investments in transport corridors, ports, renewable energy generation, green hydrogen production and raw material value chains as the primary focus area. Importantly, there is a clear indication, at least on paper, that such partnerships will not be merely extractive, but will set out to tackle Africa’s concerns, including the impact of climate change.

Finally, the Political Guidelines highlight that “we will also need to revamp our external action financing, to make it more impactful and targeted for our partners and more aligned with our strategic interests.” This signals both a quantitative and qualitative shift.

So while overall the Political Guidelines can be interpreted as a political commitment to stepping up the EU’s role in climate and energy diplomacy and partnership building, they are not very concrete in terms of specific changes to make and also are not free from potential inconsistencies reflecting the need to balance the partners’ interests and priorities with the EU’s own ones. In particular with regard to supporting particularly vulnerable developing countries, climate and energy partnerships need to factor in critical elements of grant-based and concessional support, and contributions to poverty reduction and sustainable development, and not seeing these countries just as export markets for European (more or less) green products, or providers of critical raw materials.

Challenges for effective climate and energy partnerships

Recent analyses from various researchers found that there is significant potential to enhance the EU’s support for such partnerships if identified shortcomings would be overcome.

For these climate partnerships to be successful, they need to be centred around human rights and inclusive sustainable development, and be gender transformative – which has been lacking so far in the Green Deal’s foreign policy dimensions and where there are still key steps to take towards a more feminist foreign climate policy, as CAN Europe highlighted in a report.⁷

Engagement of **non-governmental stakeholders** is critical and can be improved, as has also been identified for the collaboration between the EU and India, for example. These can help build trust and increase cooperation through partnerships between businesses, governments, civil society, women’s rights organisations and multilateral organisations in both regions to foster innovation and collaboration,

⁷ [Key steps towards an EU feminist foreign climate policy - CAN Europe](#)

knowledge sharing, and capacity building in order to facilitate the transfer of technology, expertise, and best practices.⁸ Where possible, the EU should also provide finance for civil society organisations to accompany those partnerships in a critical but constructive manner.

In a policy brief, authors from the Bruegel think tank recently identified “governance fragmentation within the European Commission, lack of an integrated vision across these DGs, the Team Europe’s lack of clarity in goals, funding, timelines and long-term operational value leads” as important challenges on the EU institutional levels.⁹ E3G also found that “EU partnerships have also been only loosely integrated with Member States’ own partnerships and other Team Europe initiatives.”¹⁰

Another aspect, which CAN also encounters in conversations with civil society partners in Global South countries, is the often **perceived protectionist and also imposing character of EU policy approaches** and initiatives at the expense of third countries, which sometimes is also labelled as a colonial approach. Linked to this perception is evidence that global wealth inequality is now extremely polarised, financial globalization makes it increasingly hard to measure wealth at the top¹¹, and clearly the world’s socio-economic disparity has not been solved. CAN Europe calls upon the EU to remain vigilant and responsive as information emerges about the external impact of EU green measures applied unilaterally (including CBAM). And when planning new climate partnerships, EU policymakers must ask themselves “How does the future look like for the other side?”

This aspect also relates to a wider set of challenges around the **EU’s communication** on the external dimensions of its policies including in relation to the European Green Deal, where sometimes, after hard internal battles, the EU presents their own policy proposals as the blueprint for others (which is usually not received very well). Overall reform proposals such as the New Climate Institute’s pitch for a “Strategic Communication Task Force”, led by the Cabinet of the Commissioner for climate action and aiming to unify and amplify the EU’s Communication, need to be considered seriously.¹²

Specific **thematic focus areas** within certain bilateral and regional partnerships may vary as they should be a reflection in particular of the needs and concerns of the partner regions, as well as key priority areas from a climate policy perspective. Research analyses can be a useful guide for identifying overall priorities, as for example a report by the think tank Future Matters has done which resulted in identifying 8 EU Policy Priorities for Global Decarbonization with regard to their relevance and the EU’s particular role.¹³ The proposals include piloting results-based funding to accelerate cleantech deployment, specific support to address the structural lack of climate finance and supporting LMICs to accelerate emission mitigation or leapfrog intensive fossil fuel use (in particular in Africa and Asia). a specific Industry partnership with India to promote low-carbon steel and cement production, bilateral cooperation to enable effective emissions trading in low- and middle-income countries (in CAN Europe’s view without linking the trading of allowances with EU ETS), and specific activities to transform food

⁸ [EU-INDIA-CLIMATE-COOPERATION-BRIEF.pdf \(caneurope.org\)](#)

⁹ [Re-energising Europe’s global green reach \(bruegel.org\)](#)

¹⁰ [EU clean transition partnerships with emerging economies - E3G](#)

¹¹ [Zucman, G. \(2019\). Global wealth inequality. *Annual Review of Economics*. 11\(1\). 109-138.](#)

¹² <https://newclimate.org/resources/publications/transforming-eu-foreign-policy-reforms-to-elevate-climate>

¹³ [8 EU Policy Priorities for Global Decarbonization – Future Matters \(future-matters.org\)](#)

production (in particular in larger agri-business) to less carbon intense ways, and methane-focused activities. Providing strong collaboration examples can also help advance the international policy agenda and exchange of experience in key areas, but will have to do so in the context of mutually beneficial and equal footing partnerships giving special attention to the needs of the partner countries. It will also be critical to look into the combined benefits of adaptation and mitigation approaches which many countries want to pursue in light of the increasing and urgent adverse impacts.

In line with this, the EU's green diplomacy approach should also be seen as a tool to help the **implementation of international agreements for moving away from fossil fuels**. The March 2024 Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions in that regard should be positively noted as the EU commits to "enhance its diplomatic efforts to ensure that all partner countries integrate the [Global Stocktake] global goals of tripling global renewable energy capacity and doubling energy efficiency into their NDCs, and take action to implement them."¹⁴ Thus, the EU needs a coherent approach which provides particular support to countries to go down these trajectories. A diplomatic component should be the development of a position on, and diplomatic engagement for, international agreements towards ending the proliferation of fossil fuels (such as the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative), as also demanded by the European Parliament in its COP28 resolution, alongside the phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies.¹⁵

In CAN Europe's view, the **EU's Global Gateway Strategy** should exclude support for fossil fuel activities and infrastructure. Energy financing should be dedicated to energy access and just transition through maximising energy efficiency and progress towards fully renewable energy systems, increasing finance for, and access to, gender-just climate solutions led by grassroots and feminist organisations in the Global South and not just large infrastructure projects. Just energy transition partnerships should be democratically owned, based on local expertise, knowledge and needs, and workers' rights as well as target gender-inclusive employment, and respect human rights. Moreover, given the Global Gateway's focus on securing EU geopolitical and commercial interests¹⁶, the Strategy has seriously compromised the focus on climate impacts, despite this being a priority for partner countries and a major criticism of the European Green Deal.

Given the rapidity of advancements in **digital technologies**, there is potential for the EU to greatly enhance its global climate diplomacy by integrating digital into a new Green Diplomacy Strategy. For example, there are strong overlaps between a 100% renewable energy future and advanced digital technology, including via energy efficiency and grid management. Additionally, digital technologies will play a critical role in climate adaptation for communities/ regions vulnerable to climate impacts, including through data-driven early warning systems and climate modelling tools. Fully adopting such technologies will necessitate economy-wide changes - and could create vast job/ skills/ livelihood opportunities in deprived areas. EU climate diplomacy and partnerships should embrace these

¹⁴ Council Conclusions on Green Diplomacy: [pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu)

¹⁵ [COP28: MEPs want to end all subsidies for fossil fuel globally by 2025 | News | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu)

¹⁶ [EU Climate Partnerships – Fit for Purpose? | NewClimate Institute](https://www.newclimateinstitute.org)

opportunities through significantly increased financial provision, targeted directly at poorer communities.

Criticality of climate finance

Of overarching relevance across all those aspects is of course the issue of financial support provided to emerging partnerships. The EU overall has to be regarded as a more stable and reliable supporter of climate finance to developing countries than some of the other developed countries, with recent increases in the provision also documented by CAN Europe research.¹⁷ However, this has to be seen against the background of an overall completely insufficient level of finance provided by developed countries in light of their capabilities and historic responsibilities - the 100 billion USD annual goal under the UNFCCC has never been needs-based and sufficient - and the political task to agree on a New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) for post-2025 climate finance at this year's UNFCCC climate summit COP29. This must signal a step change from billions of support to trillions with a strong focus on grants and concessional loans to trigger the course change at a speed that the climate emergency requires, also contributing to the much-needed full alignment of financial flows with the goals of the Paris Agreement everywhere. CAN Europe has laid out key climate finance expectations towards EU finance ministers in a recent letter.¹⁸ The negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework in 2025 will be a critical component alongside the pursuit of new sources of finance which can generate additional revenues at a significant scale, in particular from polluters and profiteers of the multiple crises and with various proposals being on the table.¹⁹

In the next years, **partnerships which deserve particular attention** in CAN Europe's view are those with Latin America (including through the roadmap towards the July 2025 EU CELAC summit), with Africa, and with India. These fit the priorities also reflected in the Political Guidelines which note an African Union EU summit in 2025 and also promise a new Strategic EU-India agenda. They all have existing collaboration frameworks and guiding documents, which need to be filled further with life and put into practice against the background of the climate emergency and the need to reduce emissions rapidly in this decade and to build climate resilience for the protection of people and nature.

Key recommendations

- 1. Develop a new Green Diplomacy Strategy** that strengthens governance, streamlines new and existing partnerships, puts proactive climate diplomacy (including on international wealth taxation) at the heart of external operations, and carefully implements bilateral/ multilateral agreements cognizant of the EU's environmental, equity, and peace objectives.
- 2. Strengthen inclusiveness and civil society involvement:** many, if not most of the existing partnerships lack clear civil society engagement structures or involvement moments. Related EU institutional structures - EC, EEAS, European Parliament (incl. with specific geographical focus) -

¹⁷ [PRESS RELEASE: Climate Finance Study Reveals Increased EU Action Required Ahead of COP29 - CAN Europe](#)

¹⁸ [Letter to EU Economy and Finance Ministers ahead of Upcoming ECOFIN Council - CAN Europe](#)

¹⁹ [New Sources for Public Climate Finance and for the Loss and Damage Fund - CAN Europe](#)

8. **Promote research and development & support knowledge sharing:** Encourage knowledge sharing and capacity-building programs between the EU and the respective partner regions, in order to facilitate the transfer of technology, expertise, and best practices. This can include research and development in clean energy technologies, such as solar and wind power, hydrogen fuel cells, and energy storage systems, but also experience sharing around policy tools in the sense of regulatory cooperation.
 9. **Collaboratively address impacts of CBAM:** the new CBAM has emerged as a policy tool already causing interest, but also tension with partner countries (partially depending on the expected impacts on them). With the implementation of CBAM moving ahead, it will be critical that in particular the European side approaches the partners' concerns proactively and improves on its communication. That will also help with practice-oriented revisions of CBAM rules in the future. The Task Force on International carbon pricing and markets diplomacy announced as part of the EC's 2040 target communication in February can become an important dialogue platform in this regard and should also involve civil society inclusion.
 10. **Ensure that new and existing industrial partnerships align with European social values, peace and security aims, and environmental objectives:** wherever the EU is seeking to form partnerships for the extraction/supply of raw material and minerals, the production of cleantech components, or provision of renewable energy (namely, green hydrogen); it is critically important that policymakers are cognizant of the risks of ecological degradation and political/social destabilization.
 11. **Significantly increase finance provision:** The EU has to find ways to significantly step up the financial support for climate and energy partnerships with developing countries, including through the negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework in 2025 and the pursuit of new sources of finance which can generate additional revenues at significant scale, with a suggested focus on instruments which address emission-intense sectors and wealthy parts of the society. In its own finance channels, the EU should also promote easier access for local communities tackling the climate crisis.
-