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**REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND  
THE COUNCIL**

**2022 Annual Report**

**on the implementation of the European Union's External Action Instruments  
in 2021**

{SWD(2022) 353 final}

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# GLOBAL COMMITMENTS

## Introduction

In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a significant impact on the European Union's external relations. Through a 'Team Europe' approach, the EU, its Member States and European financial institutions helped lead the global fightback against COVID-19 including sharing over 380 million vaccine doses with partner countries. This united EU response again demonstrated the adaptability, flexibility and power of its external action instruments, and the value of its international partnerships.

This report outlines key elements of the EU's financial support for international cooperation and development, humanitarian aid, foreign policy and enlargement in 2021<sup>1</sup>.

2021 was a year of transition, as the multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-2027 introduced a new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe)<sup>2</sup>, integrating most existing external financing instruments and endowed with an initial budget of EUR 79.5 billion.

The EU continued to champion a long-term agenda aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Using the 'Team Europe' approach, a portfolio of initiatives was developed to increase the impact and effectiveness of EU action to tackle pressing challenges such as growing global inequalities, the digital divide and the environmental emergency.

In 2021, the EU strengthened relations with its bordering countries and regions and reaffirmed its support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans. The Commission started to implement a revised enlargement methodology, reflected in the Commission's 2021 Enlargement Package<sup>3</sup>.

The European Commission and the High Representative also adopted a new Agenda for the Mediterranean<sup>4</sup> to renew the partnership with its Southern Neighbourhood including a dedicated economic and investment plan to support long-term socio-economic recovery.

The sixth Eastern Partnership Summit set out a shared vision for the future and endorsed a renewed agenda focusing on recovery, resilience and reform, as outlined in the proposal presented by the Commission and the High Representative in July 2021.

On 15 April 2021, the EU and members of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) initialled a new 20-year partnership framework: the 'post-Cotonou' agreement. In preparation for the 2022 Summit with the African Union (AU), the EU worked on strengthening and deepening cooperation with Africa.

Following the takeover by the Taliban in Afghanistan, the EU announced a support package worth EUR 1 billion to address urgent needs across the country and region. During the EU-India Leaders' Meeting of 8 May 2021, the EU and India launched a comprehensive Connectivity Partnership.

The EU also updated its Arctic policy. During the 2021 International Ocean Governance Forum, the EU presented recommendations on ocean sustainability.

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<sup>1</sup> For details see the Staff Working Document accompanying this annual report Part I, Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/947 of 9 June 2021](#).

<sup>3</sup> [2021 Enlargement package \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> [JOIN\(2021\) 2 final of 9 February 2021](#).

In early 2021, the Commission proposed to further strengthen the EU's global humanitarian impact<sup>5</sup> and expedite the delivery of humanitarian aid by supporting humanitarian partners, expanding the donor base and addressing the root causes of crises through a 'Team Europe' approach.

The promotion and protection of peace in the world is a cornerstone of EU external action. The off-budget European Peace Facility<sup>6</sup>, established in early 2021, aims to preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security.

The EU also demonstrated its commitment to democratisation and human rights by deploying six election observation missions (The Gambia, Honduras, Iraq, Kosovo\*, Venezuela, Zambia), as well as follow-up missions in more than ten countries.

At the very end of the year, President von der Leyen launched the Global Gateway strategy<sup>7</sup>, a major investment programme anchored in the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement, to boost sustainable connectivity around the world.

### EU: a strong global actor

The EU remains one of the few actors with a global presence and a comprehensive policy toolbox able to support our partners around the world. The EU and its Member States are committed to taking account of sustainable development objectives in all external policies and in internal policies that affect partner countries.

Trade policy is one of the tools through which the EU can exercise its role as a strong global actor while supporting its trading partners. Openness, sustainability, and assertiveness constitute the three pillars of EU trade strategy. The Trade Policy Review adopted in 2021<sup>8</sup> outlines how trade, in synergy with other policies, can support economic recovery while promoting the green and digital transition and a more sustainable and fairer globalisation.

The EU and its Member States remain the leading provider of official development assistance (ODA) worldwide, with EUR 70.2 billion provided in 2021<sup>9</sup> (EUR 67.3 billion in 2020), representing 43 % of global ODA<sup>10</sup> and 0.49 % of EU gross national income (0.50 % in 2020)<sup>11</sup>.

The EU sees rules-based multilateralism as the cornerstone of peaceful international relations, with the United Nations (UN) at its core. In 2021, the Commission and the High Representative put forward a new strategy<sup>12</sup> to strengthen the EU's contribution to rules-based multilateralism, laying out the EU's ambitions for the multilateral system.

Throughout 2021, the EU supported humanitarian organisations across a wide range of crisis-affected countries and regions, and deployed humanitarian operations in more than 80 countries.

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<sup>5</sup> [COM\(2021\) 110 final of 10 March 2021](#).

<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/fpi/what-we-do/european-peace-facility\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/fpi/what-we-do/european-peace-facility_en)

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

<sup>7</sup> [JOIN\(2021\) 30 final of 1 December 2021](#).

<sup>8</sup> [COM\(2021\) 66 final of 18 February 2021](#).

<sup>9</sup> Based on preliminary 2021 data from the OECD, published in spring 2022.

<sup>10</sup> 'Global ODA' is defined here as including the ODA reported by the EU collectively and all other donor countries.

<sup>11</sup> This ratio slightly decreased as the nominal increase in ODA was not commensurate with the high nominal increase of GNI due to the economic recovery.

<sup>12</sup> [JOIN\(2021\) 3 final of 17 February 2021](#).

The larger part of EU humanitarian funding addresses needs arising from protracted crises, mainly driven by conflict and compounded by COVID-19 and climate change.

The EU, together with its Member States, remains the world's leading donor of humanitarian assistance. In 2021, the EU alone allocated over EUR 2.1 billion to humanitarian aid.

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism was activated 114 times in 2021, for a wide range of disasters. It facilitated the delivery of numerous items of critical personal protective and medical equipment, including almost 30 million COVID-19 vaccine doses. Some 95 air operations were also organised to evacuate EU citizens and persons under the EU's duty of care from Afghanistan.

### Fostering sustainable development

The severe economic crisis initiated by the pandemic affected progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The EU believes that the global recovery must be green, digital, inclusive, just, sustainable, and geared towards the SDGs and committed to building back a better future for all, based on the 2030 Agenda.

In 2021, the EU refocused the European Semester financial coordination exercise on the SDGs and integrated them into the revision of the Better Regulation framework, so they are reflected across all Commission policymaking.

The EU further developed its financial instruments and aid provision to deliver on commitments to sustainable development, in line with the Council Conclusions from 10 June 2021 on the European financial architecture for development (EFAD). Following the adoption of the NDICI-Global Europe, the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) was initiated. Out of the total capacity of the EU External Action Guarantee (up to EUR 53.45 billion), close to EUR 40 billion will be available to reduce investment risk in sustainable development in partner countries.

In 2021, the EU also adopted and started implementation of the Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III), endowed with an initial budget of EUR 14.5 billion during 2021-2027 for the Western Balkans and Turkey. The economic investment plan and its Green Agenda for the Western Balkans is supported by EUR 9 billion from IPA III, which can leverage an additional EUR 20 billion investment in the region.

To foster the sustainable dimension of the EU's trade agreements, in 2021 the Commission launched a review of the 15-Point Action Plan. This review included an open public consultation and an independent comparative study on trade and sustainable development practices in third countries' trade agreements, which confirmed the EU as key frontrunner in promoting sustainability via trade agreements.

### Team Europe initiatives: responding to the COVID-19 global crisis

By the end of 2021, the EU and its Member States had disbursed EUR 47.7 billion in financial support for over 140 partner countries to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. This helped address humanitarian needs, improve health, water and sanitation systems, and mitigate the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. By the end of 2021, the total Team Europe support package pledged was EUR 53.7 billion.

Equitable access to vaccination is key to defeating COVID-19 globally. The EU not only secured enough vaccine doses for all EU Member States, but also exported or shared over 1.7 billion doses to 165 partner countries. The EU and its Member States played a leading role in setting up the COVAX

Facility, the only global initiative supporting fair distribution of vaccines, and contributed over EUR 3 billion to it<sup>13</sup>. By the end of 2021, the EU and its Member States were the largest donor of COVID-19 vaccines in the world.

EUR 1 billion has been pledged for a Team Europe initiative supporting local and regional manufacturing and access to vaccines, medicines and health technologies in Africa, for Africa.

The EU strengthened international cooperation against the pandemic during 2021, including through the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) initiative and the G20+ Global Health Summit, where leaders signed the Rome Declaration on preparing for and preventing future pandemics.

## Global Gateway

In December, the EU launched a new strategy, Global Gateway<sup>14</sup>, to mobilise investment totalling up to EUR 300 billion over 2021-2027. In line with the EU's geopolitical ambitions and commitment to the 2030 Agenda, the Global Gateway strategy aims to boost smart, clean and secure links in digital, energy and transport, and to strengthen health, education and research systems across the world to underpin a lasting global recovery while promoting universal values and high standards, good governance and transparency.

Through a 'Team Europe' approach, the Global Gateway brings together resources from the EU budget, Member States, European financial institutions and national development finance institutions and will actively seek to mobilise private sector finance and expertise to support access to sustainable finance.

## GLOBAL PRIORITIES

### Human development

In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to disrupt societies in multiple ways, leading to increasing inequalities. The EU strengthened and adapted its collaboration with global health, education, youth and gender equality initiatives while reorienting EU support to partner countries to alleviate the impact of COVID-19 on human development.

In addition to supporting the COVAX Facility, the EU also continued its leading support to GAVI's core work of building immunisations systems and the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, to limit the pandemic's damage to life-saving interventions targeting these killer diseases.

As the pandemic continued to disrupt education, the Commission decided to increase funding to this priority to at least 10 % of the total international partnerships budget for 2021-2027. In 2021, the EU increased its contribution to the Global Partnership for Education by nearly 50 %, to EUR 700 million until 2027 helping 175 million boys and girls to learn and get a further 88 million children in school. The Erasmus+ programme also saw increased funding including a 3.5 times boost for Sub-Saharan Africa during 2021-2027.

Implementation of the Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) showed the EU's commitment to making gender equality and empowerment of women and girls a priority.

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<sup>13</sup> As of June 2021.

<sup>14</sup> [JOIN\(2021\) 30 final of 1 December 2021](#).

The EU committed to ensuring that at least 85 % of all new external actions have gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment as a significant or principal objective by 2025 – the figure has already reached 70 %<sup>15</sup>.

Furthermore, the EU enhanced youth engagement in recovery efforts by setting up Youth Sounding Boards at global level and in several partner countries (such as Zimbabwe and Nigeria) to give young people a voice on EU policies and action.

## Green Deal

In 2021, the EU continued to be a global leader in tackling climate change and environmental challenges, standing at the forefront of international efforts to promote sustainable and inclusive development in line with the European Green Deal. The EU has set an ambitious spending target of 30 % of the Global Europe budget in 2021-2027 to contribute to climate objectives, with EUR 4 billion added following President von der Leyen's State of the Union address.

The Council Conclusions of 25 January 2021 on climate and energy diplomacy<sup>16</sup> stressed that EU energy diplomacy should accelerate the global energy transition and promote energy efficiency and renewable technologies. The EU also called for a worldwide phase-out of coal in energy production and the launch of international initiatives to reduce methane emissions. In February 2021, the Commission adopted a new strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change scaling up the EU's ambition on adaptation with partner countries<sup>17</sup>.

In this light, the EU made a strong contribution to the success of the 2021 COP26 Climate Conference in Glasgow, including through EU support to the Just Transition Partnership with South Africa and a EUR 1 billion contribution to the Global Forest financial pledge.

By the end of 2021, EU-supported actions in partner countries had contributed to new renewable energy capacity of 18 GW and over 22 million people accessing sustainable energy services.

The Western Balkans partners adopted an ambitious action plan to implement the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, in line with the European Green Deal.

In 2021, the new European Instrument for International Nuclear Safety Cooperation was adopted<sup>18</sup> with a budget of EUR 300 million for 2021-2027 to promote nuclear safety worldwide.

In 2021, the EU allocated EUR 75 million of the humanitarian aid budget to disaster preparedness, including potential impacts of climate change. The Communication on Humanitarian Action, published in March 2021, looks to step up EU activities addressing the humanitarian impacts of climate change and environmental degradation and to further mainstream disaster preparedness in EU-funded humanitarian actions.

In 2021, the EU also contributed to the success of the UN Food Systems and Tokyo Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summits. At N4G, the EU pledged EUR 2.5 billion for 2021-2024 (EUR 1.4 billion for development and EUR 1.1 billion for humanitarian aid) to address malnutrition. Furthermore, in

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<sup>15</sup> Data for 2021 are still preliminary.

<sup>16</sup> [Council Conclusions 5263/21 of 25 January 2021](#).

<sup>17</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/adaptation-climate-change/eu-adaptation-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/adaptation-climate-change/eu-adaptation-strategy_en)

<sup>18</sup> [Council Regulation 2021/948 of 27 May 2021](#).



2021 the EU pledged EUR 140 million to support the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, the largest global network on agricultural research for development.

2021 was also an important year for biodiversity, with a commitment to doubling external funds and the launch of NaturAfrica, an initiative to protect biodiversity while improving livelihoods. Country programmes were developed to support Africa's Great Green Wall initiative. The EU also launched its Forest Partnerships at the COP26 Conference.

To promote sustainable and integrated water management, the EU developed Team Europe initiatives on transboundary water management for Africa and on water, energy and climate in Central Asia.

The EU is committed to pursuing international cooperation on sustainable consumption and production, including the circular economy. It continued to implement SWITCH to Green, the EU's flagship initiative.

### Digitalisation, science, technology and innovation

In 2021, the EU defined its policy objectives for the Digital Global Gateway. To foster a 'Team Europe' approach a working group was established under the global Digital for Development (D4D) Hub. The hub operates through regional branches to establish digital partnerships and boost joint investments. The Latin America and the Caribbean Branch launched on 14 December 2021.

In June 2021 the EU's BELLA programme celebrated the landing of a fibre-optic cable linking the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean to provide secure, high-capacity data connections for over 12 000 educational and research institutions in both regions.

2021 saw increased visibility of EU space programmes, including their key role in the green transition. Three technical assistance facilities (TAFs) dedicated to space and Earth observation will strengthen the use of space technologies in support of partner countries and EU policies.

2021 also saw the launch of the ACP-EU EUR 60 million programme to strengthen research and innovation capacity in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries<sup>19</sup>.

In October 2021, the EU launched its Western Balkans Agenda for Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport<sup>20</sup>.

### Sustainable growth and jobs

During 2021, the EU acted to improve the business and investment environment, increase financial inclusion and access to financial services, and promote trade and trade facilitation for sustainable development and value chains. It promoted decent work by improving social, labour and environmental sustainability, by overcoming gender inequality and barriers to women's and youth economic empowerment and by improving vocational and educational training policies and systems.

EUR 3 million was committed to extend the EU expert facility on employment, labour and social protection (SOCIEUX+) that provides short-term, peer-to-peer technical assistance to Western Balkan countries.

A Team Europe initiative was launched to help young businesses and entrepreneurs in Africa to address the challenge of access to medium- and long-term finance.

<sup>19</sup> [ACP-EU Research and Innovation Programme \(europa.eu\)](https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/831554)

<sup>20</sup> <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/831554>

A EUR 15 million pilot project in 11 African countries aims to align skills training provision with the opportunities and needs of investment programmes.

The *2021 Aid for Trade Progress Report*<sup>21</sup>, published in October, confirmed the EU and its Member States as the main donors (38 %) of global aid for trade.

## Migration

In 2021, focus was on the implementation of the external dimension of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, fuelled by events in Afghanistan and Belarus and a worrying trend to use migration flows for political leverage. Attention also focused on continued irregular and unsafe migration flows and various forced displacement situations in the EU Neighbourhood, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, the Middle East and the Americas.

Throughout 2021, the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis addressed the vital needs of Syrian refugees and host communities in neighbouring countries, reaching more than 8.4 million people. A strategic support package of EUR 5.7 billion was agreed for refugees and host communities in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria covering the period 2020-2024.

To cover needs in North Africa previously funded under EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, measures amounting to EUR 165 million were adopted under NDICI-Global Europe, while a new multi-country programme on migration was being developed.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, measures amounting to EUR 234 million were adopted under the regional multiannual indicative programme (MIP) to address, in partnership with UNHCR, the forced displacement challenges of the region and to continue, with IOM, the implementation of the Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration.

In the Western Balkans, the second phase of regional support to protection-sensitive migration management ended in December 2021, building capacity in all areas of migration management.

In Asia, a package of special measures for Afghan regional displacement (EUR 79 million) was adopted at the end of 2021, as well as an action (EUR 75 million) supporting Iraq in assisting its internally displaced people and the Syrian refugees hosted on its territory.

## Governance, peace and security

In 2021, the EU launched its Team Europe Democracy initiative to better coordinate support to rule of law, accountability and governance projects in partner countries around the world.

In December 2021, President von der Leyen attended the first Summit for Democracy and announced the Commission's new Global Europe Human Rights and Democracy programme.

EU engagement with civil society organisations remained strong. The new Civil Society Thematic programme under NDICI-Global Europe, worth EUR 1.5 billion, will promote an enabling environment for civil society organisations. In addition, non-governmental actors in enlargement partner countries in the Western Balkans and Turkey can draw on the new Civil Society Facility and Media programme under IPA III with a total funding of EUR 218 million for the 2021-2023 period.

Governance, peace and security continue to be important components of the joint documents that set out political priorities between the EU and most European Neighbourhood Policy countries and

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<sup>21</sup> <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2841/018990>

enlargement countries. The IPA III continued to support the judiciary and the law enforcement community to step up the fight against organised crime.

The adoption in March 2021 of the European Peace Facility<sup>22</sup> opened new possibilities to support *inter alia* the military and defence capabilities of partner countries. The aim is to promote domestic resilience and peace and enhance the capacity and interoperability of armed forces to contribute to common security and defence policy military missions and operations.

## GLOBAL REACH

### Sub-Saharan Africa

During 2021, important political and policy dialogues paved the way towards the 2022 Summit with the African Union (AU). EU and AU Ministers of foreign affairs met in Kigali in October 2021, outlining four key priority areas: strengthened joint response to COVID-19; strategies to accelerate post-COVID-19 recovery, green and digital transitions; peace, security and governance; and migration and mobility. In June 2021, the AU and the European Commission co-hosted the fourth AU-EU agricultural ministerial conference.

On 16 April, the Council endorsed a new EU integrated strategy for the Sahel with a more comprehensive approach focused on strengthened governance, development and mutual accountability. A new Horn of Africa strategy was adopted on 10 May to deepen the EU strategic relationship with the region.

In 2021 the EU provided around EUR 730 million of humanitarian aid in the region focusing on food security, COVID-19 response, disaster prevention and preparedness, and providing basic support to displaced people and populations affected by conflict. EUR 85.5 million was allocated to the crisis in Ethiopia and EUR 81.3 million to address the consequences of the conflict in South Sudan.

In 2021, 44 country multiannual indicative programmes were adopted with African partners for the period 2021-2027. The total initial budget allocated by NDICI-Global Europe to Sub-Saharan Africa is EUR 29.18 billion including a EUR 10.2 billion regional programme, which will respond to multi-country priorities.

### Asia and the Pacific

2021 saw the launch of the EU's new policy framework for the region. The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific<sup>23</sup> marked increased engagement.

The 13th Summit of the Asia-Europe Meeting took place virtually on 25-26 November 2021, under the theme 'Strengthening Multilateralism for Shared Growth'.

An EU-Japan Summit saw the signature of a green alliance to protect the environment, fight climate change and achieve green growth.

In Bangladesh, the EU continued its engagement on the humanitarian challenge caused by the Rohingya crisis.

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<sup>22</sup> [Council Decision \(CFSP\) 2021/509 of 22 March 2021](#).

<sup>23</sup> [JOIN\(2021\) 24 final of 16 September 2021](#).

Launched at the COP26 Conference in November 2021, the Team Europe initiative Green Blue alliance for the Pacific and Timor-Leste promotes equal societies, fundamental values, human development, and peace and security across 18 partner countries and OCTs.

The Council Conclusions on Afghanistan adopted in September 2021 laid down benchmarks for engagement with the Taliban authorities, calling for humanitarian access, safe passage, and respect for human rights – especially the rights of women and girls, and minorities, counter-terrorism commitments and inclusive governance.

2021 also saw a resumption of the EU-Gulf Cooperation Council partnership.

### Americas and the Caribbean

EU relations with the region intensified in 2021. The President of the European Council participated in the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Summit. On 2 December 2021, EU and LAC leaders met, resuming high-level bi-regional dialogue after a break of six years. The discussion confirmed a common agenda focused on a sustainable, digital and inclusive recovery from the pandemic.

Progress was achieved on ratifying the Central American Association Agreement, while work continued with Mercosur and Chile on the conclusion of EU association agreements, as well as with Mexico on the modernisation of the Global Agreement.

The EU renewed and reinforced its sanctions regime against Nicaragua in reaction to political repression and election fraud.

The EU also continued to support the protection and integration of migrants and refugees from Venezuela, including to their host countries.

In 2021, the EU mobilised EUR 17 million to mitigate acute food insecurity in Haiti and protect victims of violence. The EU also invested in disaster preparedness and swiftly mobilised emergency funding following the 14 August earthquake.

### European Neighbourhood

During 2021, the EU continued to develop its relations with eastern partners both bilaterally and regionally under the European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership frameworks.

The EU maintained an active dialogue at the highest political level, including a summit in Kyiv in October.

A new agenda for the Eastern Partnership was endorsed at the Partnership Summit in December 2021. The associated economic and investment plan is worth EUR 2.3 billion and aims to leverage further investments of up to EUR 17 billion.

Flagship initiatives identified under each partner country's plan, will kick-start implementation. While the Belarus regime has decided to suspend its participation in the Eastern Partnership, the EU continues to support citizens and civil society in the country.

A ministerial conference in November saw EU and Southern Neighbourhood partners confirm their commitment to the new Agenda for the Mediterranean<sup>24</sup> including a dedicated economic and investment plan.

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<sup>24</sup> [JOIN\(2021\) 2 final of 9 February 2021](#).

The EU continued to provide assistance to Syria and neighbouring refugee-hosting countries. The fifth Brussels Conference in March generated pledges worth EUR 5.3 billion.

The EU also continued to support efforts to stabilise Libya. Operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI guaranteed the implementation of the UN arms embargo, while the EU Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission Libya built up the Libyan authorities' capacities in border management, law enforcement and criminal justice.

## Enlargement

In October 2021, the Commission's enlargement package reviewed the situation in the candidate and potential candidate accession countries and provided a clear roadmap to accelerate reforms in line with the revised enlargement methodology based on the principle of own merits. In December, four EU accession negotiation chapters on the green agenda and sustainable connectivity were opened with Serbia, while an intergovernmental conference provided additional political steer for Montenegro to further progress on its EU accession path.

This was accompanied by the initial implementation of the EUR 9 billion economic investment plan (EIP) and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The plan aims at bridging the socio-economic gap between the region and the EU, bolstering economic recovery and the green and digital transition, and associating the region with key EU initiatives to bring tangible benefits to citizens of these countries.

This relies on the successful roll-out of the IPA III, adopted in 2021. More than EUR 4.1 billion was committed in the first IPA III programming exercise, 75 % of which contributes directly to the EIP.

Unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkans and commitment to enhanced cooperation with the region was also reflected in two summits: the Berlin Process Summit in Berlin (July), and the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Brdo (October).

The EU and its Western Balkans partners continued to implement the EUR 3.3 billion package of financial assistance adopted in 2020 to combat COVID-19 and its socio-economic impacts, as well as support vaccination campaigns. The region has received more than 6.5 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines from the EU and its Member States, in addition to the 1.5 million purchased early through the COVAX initiative.

In 2021, the Facility for Refugees in Turkey provided some 1.8 million refugees with basic humanitarian needs support and 695 000 refugee children with educational support. Millions also benefit from healthcare and protection services. Under the development element of the facility, EUR 560 million was allocated to ensure continued education support to refugees in Turkey and migration and border management.

## Overseas countries and territories (OCTs)

The OCTs maintain special constitutional links with three Member States: Denmark, France and the Netherlands. The new Decision on the Overseas Association including Greenland<sup>25</sup> updated the legal framework of the EU-OCT partnership, placing cooperation within the same instrument. The EU earmarked financial support of EUR 500 million to the OCTs for 2021-2027.

Three regional programmes will foster cooperation among OCTs in the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.

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<sup>25</sup> [Council Decision \(EU\) 2021/1764 of 5 October 2021](#).

During 2021-2027, the EU will help New Caledonia (EUR 30.9 million), Sint Maarten (EUR 7.7 million) and Saba (EUR 4.1 million) develop the necessary policy, legal framework and infrastructure to implement a clean energy transition.