

50 years on, the EU remains a reliable and forward-looking partner for Uganda

This year, the European Union and the Republic of Uganda mark a significant milestone: 50 years of European Union presence and partnership in Uganda. Over five decades, this relationship has grown in depth, scale and ambition, accompanying Uganda through profound transformation while the European Union itself evolved from a nine-member economic community into a political and economic union of 27 member states.

Cooperation between Europe and Uganda took shape in the mid-1970s with the opening of a European Delegation in Kampala in 1976, at a time when both Uganda and the European project were navigating complex transitions. From the outset, the partnership was grounded in a shared conviction that dialogue and cooperation should endure even in challenging contexts, and that long-term development is built through continuity and trust.

Over 50 years, the European Union has provided close to €5 billion in development funding to Uganda, complemented by a similar volume of European private investment. Early cooperation focused on rebuilding infrastructure, strengthening rural development and expanding access to basic services. Roads, schools and health facilities supported by the EU over decades have helped connect communities, improve access to opportunities and support local economies.

As Uganda has evolved, so too has the EU–Uganda partnership. What began as development cooperation has matured into a broader relationship grounded in shared economic opportunity, regional stability and joint responsibility for global challenges. The EU has been a steady partner in Uganda's transition from conflict to recovery, particularly in northern Uganda, where support helped restore livelihoods, strengthen local governance and reconnect communities to national development through programmes such as the Development Initiative for Northern Uganda.

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> **Jan Sadek**
> **Partnerships**



Today, cooperation increasingly focuses on job creation, sustainable growth, climate action and social inclusion. Through the EU–Uganda Forest Partnership and investments in renewable energy, collaboration supports environmental protection while creating employment and strengthening rural livelihoods. Under the EU's Global Gateway strategy, this engagement is being scaled up to mobilise sustainable investment in energy, transport and digital connectivity in support of Uganda's long-term development ambitions.

Economic and trade relations have become defining pillars of the partnership. Since 2019, tariff-free Ugandan exports to the EU have almost tripled from EUR 500 million to approximately EUR 1.4 billion. Uganda has registered a positive trade balance with the EU since 2022, demonstrating the competitiveness of its producers.

Few products illustrate this transformation better than coffee, long at the heart of Uganda's economy. EU-supported initiatives in quality improvement, certification and traceability are helping Ugandan coffee access higher-value markets, increasing incomes for farmers and creating jobs along the value chain.

At the heart of the partnership lies a shared investment in people. Through education cooperation and programmes such as Erasmus+, thousands of Ugandans have benefited from training and academic exchanges with European institutions. EU support has also strengthened access to essential health services, while promoting gender equality, girls' education and the fight against gender-based violence.

The European Union also continues to support governance reforms, civil society organisations and human rights initiatives, reflecting a shared understanding that sustainable development depends on accountable institutions, the rule of law and inclusive participation.

Peace and security cooperation remains equally important. Uganda's contributions to regional stability, including through peace support operations and hosting refugees from across the region, are widely recognised. Uganda's current chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement reflects its growing diplomatic role and commitment to multilateral cooperation. Throughout shifting geopolitical landscapes, the European Union has remained a predictable and reliable partner, supporting stability, humanitarian response and development for both refugee and host communities.

As we look ahead, partnerships based on trust, mutual respect and long-term commitment matter more than ever.

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