

150 TERMS IN PLAIN LANGUAGE

Glossary

The words people use at the UN, the African Union and in development finance, explained simply.

HOW IT WORKS

Across the briefing, the first use of each of these words on a page has a dotted underline. Tap or click it for this explanation without leaving the page.

A

The Abuja target

A promise made by African governments in Abuja in 2001 to spend 15% of their budgets on health. Few have met it.

[Health briefing](#)

The Accra Reset

A process started in 2025 by Ghana's President John Mahama after cuts to health aid. In September 2026 its panel proposed merging several global health funds and handing their work to African governments over five to ten years.

[Health briefing](#) · [Source: healthpolicy-watch.news](#)

Adaptation finance

Money to help countries live with climate change, for example drought-resistant crops, flood defences and early warning systems.

[Climate and energy briefing](#)

AfCFTA

The African Continental Free Trade Area. Its members have agreed to cut tariffs and trade barriers between African countries.

[Source: au-afcfta.org](#)

Africa CDC

The African Union's public health agency, based in Addis Ababa. It coordinates disease control across the continent.

[Health briefing](#) · [Source: africacdc.org](#)

Africa Fertilizer Financing Mechanism

A fund run by the African Development Bank, set up by African Union leaders in 2006. It helps pay for making, buying and delivering fertiliser in Africa, and holds about \$36.9 million from African governments and donors.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Food and agriculture briefing](#) · [Source: afdb.org](#)

Africa Health Workforce Investment Charter

An agreement on health workers adopted in Windhoek, Namibia, in May 2024. It asks each government to turn its promises on health workers into a costed national plan, and WHO's Africa office checks progress against it.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Source: afro.who.int](#)

The African Group at the UN

The 54 African member states working together as one of the UN's five regional groups. The groups put forward candidates for elections to UN bodies. The African Group itself has no vote on the Security Council.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

African Group of Negotiators

The group of African countries that negotiate together in UN climate talks. It was set up in 1995 and speaks for Africa on money, adaptation and loss and damage.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Climate and energy briefing](#) · [Source: unfccc.int](#)

African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA)

A US law that lets eligible African countries sell many goods to the United States without import duty. It lapsed in September 2025 and was renewed in September 2026 until the end of 2028.

[Livelihoods and labour briefing](#) · [Source: the-star.co.ke](#)

African heads of state committee on climate change

A committee of African heads of state that sets Africa's political line in UN climate talks. Kenya's President William Ruto coordinates it.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Climate and energy briefing](#) · [Source: thesierraleonetelegraph.com](#)

African Medicines Agency

A continental regulator for medicines and vaccines, based in Kigali. It is still being set up.

[Health briefing](#)

The African members of the Security Council

Africa holds three of the ten elected seats on the Security Council, each for two years. The three usually coordinate their positions. They are the only African voices inside the Council.

[The UN and diplomacy briefing](#)

African Minerals Development Centre

An African Union agency, hosted by Guinea, that helps member states turn mineral wealth into industry and jobs under the Africa Mining Vision.

[Climate and energy briefing](#) · [Source: au.int](#)

African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA)

The African Union's set of bodies for preventing and managing conflict. It includes the Peace and Security Council, an early warning system, a panel of senior mediators, a standby force and the Peace Fund.

[Security and conflict briefing](#)

African Peer Review Mechanism

A voluntary African Union process in which member states review each other's governance and publish the results.

[Politics and governance briefing](#)

African Risk Capacity

An African Union agency, set up in 2012, that helps governments plan for and respond to droughts and other disasters. Its sister company sells drought insurance to African governments and pays out when agreed conditions are met.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Food and agriculture briefing](#) · [Source: arc.int](#)

African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF)

A body that brings together Africa's national tax authorities to share methods and agree common positions on tax.

[Philanthropy briefing](#)

African Union (AU)

The organisation of 55 African states, based in Addis Ababa. Its heads of state meet each February. It can suspend members after a coup.

[Source: au.int](#)

African Union Commission

The African Union's secretariat. It prepares decisions for heads of state and carries them out.

Al-Shabaab

An armed Islamist group in Somalia that fights the Somali government. It controls large parts of rural southern and central Somalia.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Source: crisisgroup.org](#)

Alliance of Sahel States

Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, each ruled by a military government after a coup. They formed their own alliance and left ECOWAS in January 2025. The African Union has suspended them.

[Politics and governance briefing](#)

AMCOW

The African Ministers' Council on Water, formed in Abuja in 2002. It brings Africa's water ministers together to cooperate on managing the continent's water and on sanitation.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Water briefing](#) · [Source: amcow-online.org](#)

Annex

A set of extra terms attached to an agreement. Both sides must accept it, and it then has the same force as the main text.

Anticipatory action

Releasing money and help when a forecast shows a disaster is likely, before it strikes, because acting early costs less.

[Food and agriculture briefing](#)

Article 6 carbon credits

Rules under the Paris Agreement that let one country pay another to cut emissions and count the cut towards its own target. The seller gives a letter of authorisation and must then not count the same cut itself.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Climate and energy briefing](#) · [Source: unfccc.int](#)

Assessed contributions

The amounts each UN member must pay each year towards the UN budget and peacekeeping, set by a formula based mainly on the size of its economy. Payment is required, but many countries pay late.

[The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Source: peacekeeping.un.org](#)

ATIDI

African Trade and Investment Development Insurance, an insurer owned by 24 African states and other investors. It insures trade and investment in Africa against risks such as war and unpaid debts. The African Development Bank became its largest shareholder in 2026.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Source: cnbcafrica.com](#)

AU Peace and Security Council

The African Union's 15-member body for conflicts. It can authorise African peace missions and suspend governments that take power by force.

[Security and conflict briefing](#)

AU Peace Fund

A fund paid for by African Union members to finance African peace work and missions.

[Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Source: au.int](#)

AUDA-NEPAD

The African Union's development agency. It plans and supports continental programmes in areas such as infrastructure, agriculture and carbon markets.

AUSSOM

The African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia. About 12,000 troops from Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Egypt, Djibouti and Burundi help Somali forces against al-Shabaab.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Security and conflict briefing](#)

Autonomous weapons talks

Talks in Geneva under a weapons treaty on whether to ban or limit weapons that choose and attack targets without human control.

[AI and technology briefing](#)

B

Bab al-Mandeb

The narrow strait between Yemen and Djibouti and Eritrea at the southern end of the Red Sea. Before 2023, about a tenth of world sea trade passed through it.

[Security and conflict briefing](#)

Back-up guarantee (counter-guarantee)

A guarantee given to a guarantor. If a national guarantee company has to pay out, a larger body such as a development bank covers part of its loss, so the smaller company can guarantee more deals.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Philanthropy briefing](#) · [Source: miga.org](#)

Bilateral and multilateral

Bilateral means between two governments only. Multilateral means through a shared body such as the UN, the World Bank or a global fund, where many countries decide together.

Blended finance

Using public or charitable money to make private investment less risky, so that private money follows.

Bundibugyo Ebola

One of several types of Ebola virus. Unlike the more common Zaire type, it has no approved vaccine or treatment.

[Health briefing](#) · [Source: who.int](#)

C

CAADP and the Kampala Declaration

The African Union's plan for farming and food. The Kampala Declaration sets its goals for 2026 to 2035.

[Food and agriculture briefing](#)

Chapter VII

The part of the UN Charter that lets the Security Council order action, including sanctions or force, to deal with threats to peace. Chapter VII decisions bind all UN members.

Co-financing

The share of a programme that the receiving government must pay itself.

[Health briefing](#)

COMESA

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, a trade bloc of 21 member states. Its members cooperate on trade and development across eastern and southern Africa.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Food and agriculture briefing](#) · [Source: comesa.int](#)

The Committee of Ten

Ten African heads of state chosen by the African Union to speak for Africa on Security Council reform.

[The UN and diplomacy briefing](#)

Concessional loan

A loan with an interest rate far below market rates and a long time to repay, usually from a development bank.

[Development cooperation briefing](#)

COP climate summits

The yearly UN climate conference. COP31 meets in Antalya, Turkey, from 9 to 20 November 2026.

[Climate and energy briefing](#) · [Source: unfccc.int](#)

Corresponding adjustment

The change a selling country makes to its own emissions accounts when it sells carbon credits to another country. It stops the same cut being counted twice.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Climate and energy briefing](#) · [Source: klik.ch](#)

CORSIA

The carbon offset scheme for international flights, run by the International Civil Aviation Organization. Airlines must offset part of the growth in their emissions, and from 2024 only credits that the selling country has authorised can be used.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Climate and energy briefing](#) · [Source: sylvera.com](#)

Credit rating

A grade given by an agency on how likely a borrower is to repay. Lower grades mean higher interest rates. African governments are setting up their own agency, the African Credit Rating Agency.

[Development cooperation briefing](#)

Critical minerals and processing

Minerals such as lithium, cobalt and copper needed for batteries and clean energy. Selling ore or concentrate earns far less than processing it at home into metals or chemicals.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Climate and energy briefing](#)

D

DAC donors

The 30-odd mostly rich countries in the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, which give most of the world's aid and report it by common rules.

Data centres and compute

Buildings full of computers that store data and run AI. Their size is measured in megawatts (MW) of electricity. "Compute" means the computing power needed to build and run AI.

[AI and technology briefing](#)

Data protection law

A law that sets rules on collecting, storing and sharing personal information, usually enforced by a national regulator.

[AI and technology briefing](#)

Debt service

The interest and repayments a government must pay on its debts each year.

[Development cooperation briefing](#)

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Africa's second-largest country by area, in central Africa. Its east has seen armed conflict for three decades, and it holds much of the world's cobalt.

[Security and conflict briefing](#)

Djibouti Code of Conduct

An agreement made in 2009 under the UN shipping agency to fight piracy in the western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden. The 2017 Jeddah Amendment widened it to cover trafficking, illegal fishing and other crimes at sea.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Source: imo.org](#)

E

East African Community

A bloc of eastern and central African states, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

ECOWAS

The Economic Community of West African States. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger left it in January 2025.

[Politics and governance briefing](#)

Education spending targets

Targets agreed by governments worldwide for 2030: spend at least 4% to 6% of national income, or 15% to 20% of public spending, on education.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Education briefing](#) · [Source: education-progress.org](#)

El Niño

A warming of the Pacific Ocean every few years that changes weather worldwide. In southern Africa it usually brings drought, and in the Horn of Africa it often brings floods.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Food and agriculture briefing](#)

Eurobond

A bond a government sells to international investors, usually in US dollars. It carries market interest rates, which are high for most African countries.

[Development cooperation briefing](#)

European Union (EU)

A union of 27 European countries with shared laws, a single market and a large aid budget.

The Ezulwini Consensus

Africa's shared position on Security Council reform, agreed in Eswatini in 2005. It asks for two permanent seats with the veto and five elected seats for Africa. It does not say which countries would take them.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#)

F

FAO

The Food and Agriculture Organization, the UN's agency for farming, fishing, forests and hunger, based in Rome.

[Food and agriculture briefing](#) · [Source: fao.org](#)

Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

An intergovernmental body that sets global rules against money laundering and the funding of terrorism. Countries that fall short can be placed on a watch list, which makes banking harder. In November 2023 it revised its rule on non-profits to discourage blanket restrictions on them.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Philanthropy briefing](#) · [Source: fatf-gafi.org](#)

First-loss guarantee

A promise by one investor, often a foundation or development bank, to absorb the first losses on an investment. It makes the investment safe enough for cautious investors such as pension funds.

[Philanthropy briefing](#)

Forward contract

A deal in which a buyer and a seller agree now on the amount, quality and price of goods to be delivered on a later date. It gives the seller a sure sale and the buyer a known price.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Food and agriculture briefing](#) · [Source: cftc.gov](#)

G

The G20

A group of 19 large economies plus the European Union and the African Union, whose leaders meet once a year. South Africa held the chair in 2025, and the United States holds it in 2026.

[Development cooperation briefing](#)

The G20 Common Framework

A process agreed by the G20 group of large economies in 2020 to restructure the debts of poor countries. It has been slow: Zambia, Ghana and Ethiopia each waited years.

[Development cooperation briefing](#)

G42

An artificial intelligence company based in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. It builds data centres and AI services in several African countries.

[AI and technology briefing](#) · [Source: g42.ai](#)

Gavi

An international alliance that buys vaccines for lower-income countries. Countries pay a rising share as their incomes grow.

[Health briefing](#) · [Source: gavi.org](#)

GEM Report

The Global Education Monitoring Report, an independent team hosted by UNESCO. It tracks progress towards the world goal on education, including how much governments and donors spend.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Education briefing](#) · [Source: education-progress.org](#)

General Debate

The part of high-level week when each country gives a speech of about 15 minutes to the General Assembly. Speeches show what a government wants people to hear. They do not commit it to anything.

The Global Fund

An international fund that pays for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria programmes. It raises money from governments and private donors every three years.

[Health briefing](#) · [Source: theglobalfund.org](#)

Global Partnership for Education (GPE)

A global fund that helps more than 90 lower-income countries pay for and improve their school systems. Donor governments and foundations pledge money to it every few years.

[Education briefing](#) · [Source: globalpartnership.org](#)

Government bills and bonds

Loans to a government that investors can buy and sell. Bills are repaid within a year and bonds over longer periods. African pension funds put much of their money into them.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Philanthropy briefing](#) · [Source: oecd.org](#)

H

High-level week

The week each September when presidents and ministers come to New York for the General Assembly. Speeches, summits and side meetings on money and deals all happen in the same few days.

The high-seas treaty

A UN treaty that came into force in January 2026 to protect marine life in waters beyond any country's control.

[Water briefing](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

The Houthis

An armed movement that controls much of Yemen, including most of its Red Sea coast. It has attacked ships in the Red Sea since 2023.

[Security and conflict briefing](#)

I

IDA and the African Development Fund

The World Bank's and the African Development Bank's funds for the poorest countries. They give grants and very cheap loans, and donors refill them every three years.

[Development cooperation briefing](#) · [Source: ida.worldbank.org](#)

IFAD

The International Fund for Agricultural Development, a UN fund that has invested in rural people since 1977. It lends to and funds programmes for small farmers, and donor governments refill it in pledging rounds every three years.

[Food and agriculture briefing](#) · [Source: ifad.org](#)

IGAD

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development, a bloc of eight states in the Horn of Africa and East Africa.

ILO convention on platform work

A treaty adopted by the International Labour Organization in June 2026. It gives people who find work through digital platforms basic protections, whatever their job status. It also gives them a way to have decisions made by algorithms reviewed. It binds only the countries that ratify it.

[AI and technology briefing](#) · [Source: ilo.org](https://ilo.org)

IMF programme

A loan from the International Monetary Fund that comes with conditions on a government's budget, such as limits on the public wage bill.

[Development cooperation briefing](#)

Informal work

Work without a contract, social security or legal protection, such as street trading or casual labour. Most African workers work informally.

[Livelihoods and labour briefing](#)

International Criminal Court (ICC)

A court in The Hague that tries people for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity when national courts do not. A country that leaves it stays bound for one year after giving notice.

[Politics and governance briefing](#) · [Source: hrw.org](https://hrw.org)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

The UN agency for work, set up in 1919. Governments, employers and workers from 187 countries sit in it together. It sets labour standards and publishes figures on jobs.

[Livelihoods and labour briefing](#) · [Source: ilo.org](https://ilo.org)

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

The UN agency that sets rules for shipping, including safety and security at sea.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Source: imo.org](https://imo.org)

J

JNIM

Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, the branch of al-Qaeda in the Sahel. It is the most active armed group in the region.

[Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Source: aljazeera.com](#)

K

Kafala

A sponsorship system in Gulf states that tied a migrant worker to one employer, who controlled whether the worker could change jobs or leave the country. Saudi Arabia announced its end in October 2025.

[Livelihoods and labour briefing](#) · [Source: walkfree.org](#)

L

Least developed countries

A UN list of the poorest countries, judged by income, health, education and how exposed their economies are to shocks. Most of them are in Africa.

[Development cooperation briefing](#) · [Source: oecd.org](#)

Localisation

The idea that aid money and decisions should move to local organisations in the countries receiving aid.

[Philanthropy briefing](#)

Loss and damage fund

A UN climate fund set up in 2023 to help countries recover from climate disasters they cannot prevent or adapt to.

M

M23

A rebel group fighting the army of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the eastern provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu. The United States says Rwanda's army supports it.

[Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Source: securitycouncilreport.org](#)

Malabo Convention

The African Union's treaty on cyber security and personal data. It came into force in 2023, but fewer than half of AU members have ratified it.

[AI and technology briefing](#) · [Source: au.int](#)

Memorandum of understanding

A written agreement setting out what two parties intend to do. It is often not legally binding and may carry no money.

Mission 300

A World Bank and African Development Bank plan to connect 300 million Africans to electricity by 2030.

[Climate and energy briefing](#) · [Source: worldbank.org](#)

MONUSCO

The UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Security Council must renew its mandate for it to continue.

[Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Source: securitycouncilreport.org](#)

N

National climate plans

Each country's plan under the Paris Agreement to cut emissions and adapt to climate change, updated every five years.

[Climate and energy briefing](#)

NEET

Young people who are not in a job, education or training.

[Livelihoods and labour briefing](#)

Nile Basin Cooperative Framework Agreement

A treaty among Nile countries that came into force on 13 October 2024. It sets up a Nile River Basin Commission to manage the river together. Upstream states such as Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania back it, and Egypt and Sudan reject it.

[Water briefing](#) · [Source: aa.com.tr](#)

Nouakchott Declaration

A statement signed by African Union education ministers in Mauritania in December 2024. It commits governments to spend 4% to 7% of national income and 15% to 25% of the budget on education, and asks the AU Commission to report on progress every two years.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Education briefing](#) · [Source: au.int](#)

O

OECD

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, a Paris-based club of 38 mostly rich countries. It keeps the official figures on aid.

[Development cooperation briefing](#)

Official development assistance (aid)

Grants and cheap loans from governments to help poorer countries develop. Its official measure is kept by the OECD, the club of mostly rich countries that give most of it.

[Development cooperation briefing](#)

Open Government Partnership

A global partnership in which governments and citizens agree and publish commitments to make government more open.

P

Pandemic Agreement

A treaty adopted by WHO members in 2025 to prepare for future pandemics. Its rules on sharing virus samples and benefits are still being negotiated.

[Health briefing](#) · [Source: who.int](#)

PAPSS

The Pan-African Payment and Settlement System. It lets people and firms pay across African borders in their own currencies without going through the US dollar.

The Paris Club

A group of mainly rich creditor governments that meets in Paris to agree how debts owed to them by poorer countries are restructured.

[Development cooperation briefing](#) · [Source: cnbcafrica.com](#)

Pathogen sharing and benefit-sharing

Pathogens are viruses and bacteria. Countries that share samples and genetic data on them want a fair share of the vaccines and medicines made from them. This is called benefit-sharing.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Health briefing](#)

Penholder

The Security Council member that leads the drafting and negotiation of decisions on a given crisis. France, the United Kingdom and the United States hold most of these roles.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Politics and governance briefing](#) · [Source: securitycouncilreport.org](#)

Pension and insurance funds

Funds that hold workers' retirement savings and insurance premiums. In most African countries they put most of their money into government bonds.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Philanthropy briefing](#)

PIDG

The Private Infrastructure Development Group, funded mainly by European governments. It invests in and guarantees infrastructure projects in poorer countries so that private investors will join.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Philanthropy briefing](#) · [Source: pidg.org](#)

Political declaration

A statement of shared intent agreed by governments. It does not commit money or create legal duties, but funders and agencies use it to set priorities.

Private equity

Shares in companies that are not listed on a stock exchange, usually bought through a fund that holds them for several years.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Philanthropy briefing](#) · [Source: oecd.org](#)

Public-benefit organisation

A charity or non-profit group registered under the law as working for the public good. In Kenya and South Africa, registration brings duties to report and, in some cases, tax relief for donors.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Philanthropy briefing](#) · [Source: bowmanslaw.com](#)

R

Rapid Support Forces (RSF)

A paramilitary group that has been at war with Sudan's army since April 2023. It took the city of El Fasher in October 2025.

[Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Source: aljazeera.com](#)

REDD+

A UN climate framework that pays developing countries to cut emissions by protecting forests and reducing forest loss.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Climate and energy briefing](#) · [Source: unfccc.int](#)

Regional economic communities

Africa's regional groupings of states, such as ECOWAS in West Africa, the East African Community, SADC in southern Africa and IGAD in the Horn. They carry out many African Union policies.

Remittances

Money that people working abroad send home to their families.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Livelihoods and labour briefing](#)

Replenishment

A pledging round in which donor governments refill a fund, such as the Global Fund or the African Development Fund, for the next three or four years.

[Development cooperation briefing](#)

Resolution 2719

A Security Council decision of December 2023. It allows UN member states' regular contributions to help pay for peace missions led by the African Union, decided case by case. It lets the UN pay up to three-quarters of such a mission's budget. It has never been used: the United States blocked its first use, for Somalia.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Source: issafrica.org](#)

S

SADC

The Southern African Development Community, 16 states from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to South Africa.

[Source: sadc.int](#)

Security Council reform talks

Talks among UN members on changing who sits on the Security Council. They have run since 2009 without a negotiating text or a deadline. Any change needs a two-thirds vote and approval by the five permanent members.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#)

Smart Africa

An alliance of African governments to put digital technology at the centre of development. It began with seven countries, and all AU heads of state endorsed its founding manifesto in January 2014.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [AI and technology briefing](#) · [Source: smartafrica.org](#)

Straw poll

An informal, secret vote in which Security Council members mark each Secretary-General candidate "encourage", "discourage" or "no opinion". Several rounds are held before the Council makes its formal choice.

[The UN and diplomacy briefing](#)

T

Tax relief for gifts

A rule that lets a donor subtract a gift to an approved charity from their taxable income, so they pay less tax. Most countries cap it, for example at 10% of taxable income in South Africa.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Philanthropy briefing](#) · [Source: sars.gov.za](#)

TCIB

An instant payment system set up by SADC countries for small transfers between them. Banks and other payment firms can connect to it, which makes sending money across Southern African borders cheaper and faster.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Livelihoods and labour briefing](#) · [Source: africanenda.org](#)

U

UN AI panel and Global Dialogue

Two UN processes on AI agreed in 2025: a scientific panel that reports on AI's risks and uses, and a yearly meeting of governments on how to govern it. A proposed UN fund would pay for AI skills in poorer countries.

[AI and technology briefing](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

UN duty station

A city where the UN bases its staff. The four main ones are New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. Nairobi is the only UN headquarters in Africa and the Global South.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Source: unon.org](#)

UN General Assembly

The meeting of all 193 UN member states, each with one vote. It meets every year from September. It can make statements, elect members of other bodies and approve the UN budget, but most of what it says does not bind governments.

[Source: un.org](#)

UN peacekeeping budget

A separate UN budget, approved each June, that pays for UN peace missions. It is paid through assessed contributions, and its largest payers are the United States and China.

[Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Source: peacekeeping.un.org](#)

UN Secretary-General

The head of the UN's staff and its main public voice. The Security Council recommends a candidate and the General Assembly appoints them, usually for five years. António Guterres's term ends on 31 December 2026.

[The UN and diplomacy briefing](#)

UN Security Council

The 15-member UN body that decides on war and peace. It can impose sanctions and send peacekeepers, and its decisions bind all UN members. Five permanent members can each block any decision.

[The UN and diplomacy briefing](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

UN support office in Somalia

A UN office that supplies food, fuel, transport and medical care to the African Union mission in Somalia. The United States agreed in September 2026 to a 12-month drawdown from January 2027, followed by closure.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Source: unsos.unmissions.org](#)

UN Water Conference

A UN meeting on the global goal of clean water and sanitation for all. The 2026 conference meets in Abu Dhabi from 8 to 10 December, co-hosted by the United Arab Emirates and Senegal.

UN80

A reform plan launched for the UN's 80th anniversary. It cuts budgets and posts, merges agencies and moves some jobs from New York and Geneva to cheaper cities such as Nairobi.

[The UN and diplomacy briefing](#)

UNEP

The UN Environment Programme, the UN's agency for the environment, based in Nairobi.

[Climate and energy briefing](#)

UNESCO

The UN agency for education, science and culture. Its statistics office publishes the main figures on schooling and research in every country.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Education briefing](#) · [Source: uis.unesco.org](#)

UNICEF

The UN's agency for children. It works on child health, nutrition, schooling, water and protection, and is funded by voluntary donations.

[Education briefing](#) · [Source: unicef.org](#)

US "America First" health agreements

Health funding deals the United States has signed with individual countries since 2025. The receiving government pays a rising share, and several deals include access to health data.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Health briefing](#)

V

Veto and permanent members

China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States hold permanent seats on the Security Council. Each can block any decision on its own. Africa has no permanent seat.

[The UN and diplomacy briefing](#)

Visa bond

A cash deposit of \$10,000, \$15,000 or \$20,000 that citizens of some countries must pay before the United States issues them a business or tourist visa. Thirty of the 50 countries on the list are African.

[Livelihoods and labour briefing](#) · [Source: africanews.com](#)

W

WAEMU

The West African Economic and Monetary Union: eight West African states that share one currency, the CFA franc, and one central bank.

[Politics and governance briefing](#)

War-risk insurance

Insurance that covers ships against war, piracy and terrorism. A committee of London insurers, the Joint War Committee, lists the sea areas where extra cover must be bought, and its list includes Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Source: lmalloyds.com](#)

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)

Clean water, toilets and handwashing. At a school, basic water means drinking water from a safe source on site, basic sanitation means usable toilets separate for girls and boys, and basic hygiene means a place to wash hands with water and soap.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Water briefing](#) · [Source: washdata.org](#)

West African Alliance on Carbon Markets and Climate Finance

A group formed in 2017 by 16 West African countries to work together on carbon markets and climate finance. The West African Development Bank supports it.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Climate and energy briefing](#) · [Source: climatefocus.com](#)

WMO

The World Meteorological Organization, the UN's agency for weather, climate and water. It coordinates forecasts and early warnings.

[Food and agriculture briefing](#) · [Source: wmo.int](#)

World Food Programme (WFP)

The UN's food aid agency. It depends on voluntary donations, which fell sharply in 2025.

[Food and agriculture briefing](#) · [Source: wfp.org](#)

World Health Assembly

The yearly meeting of all WHO members, held in Geneva each May.

[Health briefing](#)

World Health Organization (WHO)

The UN's health agency. It sets health standards and coordinates responses to outbreaks. The United States left it in January 2026.

[Health briefing](#) · [Source: who.int](#)

World Trade Organization (WTO)

The international body that sets and enforces the rules of trade between countries. A member can complain that another has broken the rules, and a panel of the WTO decides.

[Our recommendation on this](#) · [Climate and energy briefing](#) · [Source: wto.org](#)
