

II

JUDGEMENT 2 OF 7

HOW SURE WE ARE: OBSERVED

Aid now comes as a contract with a price attached

IN BRIEF

- In 2025, aid from governments fell by the largest amount on record, and direct aid to Africa fell by almost a quarter.
- The money that remains comes with conditions: the receiving government must pay a share, give access to data, help control migration or accept money borrowed on markets.

Official development assistance, the grants and cheap loans that richer governments give poorer ones, fell by 23.1% in 2025 after inflation. Much of what is left is now written as a contract. Each African government negotiates its terms alone and does not compare them with its neighbours. Africa is paying a price for aid that it did not set.

The reasoning

Total aid fell to \$174.3 billion in 2025, measured at 2024 prices. After inflation, that was a fall of 23.1%, the largest ever recorded. Direct aid to Africa from the main donor governments fell 23.9%, to \$29 billion. The United States accounts for three-quarters of the global fall, and Germany, France and the United Kingdom also cut. In June, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which keeps the official aid figures, projected another fall in 2026. It expects direct aid to sub-Saharan Africa to drop a further 11.6%. African budgets that still rely on grants should plan for less money for several years.

The money that remains is written as a contract. Thirty-five countries have signed health agreements with the United States worth \$24.1 billion over five years, counting what the countries pay themselves. The receiving governments pay 39% of the total, and their share rises each year. Kenya's agreement

gives access to genetic data and to data on viruses and bacteria. Of the European Union's €710 million package announced on 26 September, €380 million is linked to migration from sub-Saharan Africa. The African Development Fund, which lends cheaply to Africa's poorest countries, raised \$11 billion. Its cheapest money has not grown after inflation, and the increase comes from borrowing on markets.

Each of these terms is agreed one country at a time. The result is a price for aid that African governments did not set and have not compared. A common standard would let the 54 African governments agree in advance what they will trade and what they will refuse. It would also let a small country point to a rule that its larger neighbours have already accepted.

The evidence

- OECD: aid fell 23.1% after inflation to \$174.3 billion in 2025, and direct aid to Africa fell 23.9% [Source](#)
- KFF: 35 US health agreements are worth \$24.1 billion over five years, with receiving governments paying 39% [Source](#)
- UN Regional Information Centre: €380 million of the EU's €710 million package is linked to migration from sub-Saharan Africa [Source](#)
- African Development Fund: the cheapest money in its 17th funding round is flat after inflation [Source](#)

The strongest argument against

Governments that pay a rising share, with a date when they take over, are showing the ownership that African governments have asked for since the Paris Declaration on aid in 2005. The real risk sits in the clauses on data and on who supplies goods. A 39% share paid from African budgets can fairly be read as progress.

Sector briefings behind this judgement

Sector · Observed

Development cooperation

Grants for Africa are shrinking fast, and the money that replaces them asks for data, a share of the budget or market interest.

[Open the briefing](#)

Sector · Strong inference

Health

Health money for Africa now comes through one-to-one deals, and patients' data is part of the price.

[Open the briefing](#)

Sector · Observed

Livelihoods and labour

Few young Africans earn a wage, and the routes abroad for work, study and sending money home are narrowing.

[Open the briefing](#)

Recommended moves

1 YEAR · BY FEBRUARY 2027

CONTINENTAL

Agree one African standard for payment, review and exit terms in aid deals

Leads: The AU Commission with Africa CDC and African finance ministers; Zambia as the first country to use the standard

30 DAYS · BY 28 OCTOBER 2026

CONTINENTAL

Agree one African set of rules on health data for health funding deals

Leads: Africa CDC with the African Union Commission; Kenya as the first country to use the rules

Words used on this page

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](#) · [Glossary](#)

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](#) · [Glossary](#)

European Union (EU)

A union of 27 European countries with shared laws, a single market and a large aid budget. [Glossary](#)

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](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: ida.worldbank.org](#)