

CURIOSITY BRIEFING · UNGA81 · EVIDENCE TO 28 SEPTEMBER 2026

After New York

what the 2026 UN General Assembly showed, and Africa's next moves

BY AL KAGS ABOUT 9 MINUTES AT FULL LENGTH

IN BRIEF

- At the UN General Assembly in September 2026, governments agreed statements in the main hall, while the week's money was raised in side meetings that each set their own conditions.
- Africa won every argument about fairness, including its claim to permanent seats on the Security Council, and gained little where its 54 votes could have won something in return.
- The strongest tools Africa has not yet used are at home: its electricity grids, what its governments buy, and its own savings.

Every September, presidents and ministers meet in New York for the UN General Assembly. At the 81st session in 2026, governments agreed words in the main hall. The money of the week was raised elsewhere, through groups of willing countries, deals between two governments and private foundations. Each of these set its own conditions, from access to health data to help with stopping migration. Aid from richer governments fell by almost a quarter in 2025, the largest fall on record, so those conditions now carry more weight. Africa won every argument about fairness in New York, and senior UN officials agreed that it deserves permanent seats on the Security Council. Yet Africa gained little in the processes where its 54 votes could have been traded for something, such as the choice of the next Secretary-General. The strongest tools Africa has not yet used are at home. They are its electricity grids, the goods and services its governments buy, and the savings held in its pension funds.

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\$174.3bn

Total aid in 2025, down 23.1% after inflation, the largest fall on record

Source: one.oecd.org

\$2,887bn

World military spending in 2025, more than 16 times the aid budget

Source: sipri.org

\$415bn

Interest paid by developing countries on their foreign debt in 2024, a record

Source: worldbank.org

\$33bn

The UN's emergency aid appeal for 2026, to reach 135 million people. The 2025 appeal received \$12 billion

Source: unocha.org

What changed, and what did not

Changed

Health money moved outside the UN system. A meeting called by the United States raised \$2.997 billion for Ebola, and African governments gave \$110 million of it. Thirty-five countries now have US health agreements that set terms on data and on how much each government must pay.

Aid became a contract with conditions. Aid fell 23.1% after inflation in 2025. What replaces it asks governments to pay a share, give access to data or control migration. Of the European Union's €710 million package, €380 million is linked to migration.

The declaration on pandemics was not agreed. On 25 September the United States would not support the text. It now goes to a vote of the whole Assembly before its session ends in December.

Control of the Red Sea shipping route changed hands. In September the Houthis in Yemen took the town of Mocha and Perim island. Both sit beside the Bab al-Mandeb strait, which carries about 12% of world trade. No African leader raised it.

Africa split over the next UN Secretary-General. Senegal's President endorsed Macky Sall from the podium. In March, at least 20 African governments had objected to an African Union endorsement or asked for more time. In the third straw poll, Sall drew the most discouraging votes of the leading candidates.

Did not change

Security Council reform still has no timetable. In July, UN members agreed to continue the reform talks, with no end date and no single text to negotiate.

Money to help Africa adapt to climate change did not grow. The Climate Summit launched a plan for electricity grids and a group on critical minerals, with no money attached.

The UN fund for AI is empty. It has a \$3 billion target and no pledges, while Africa holds 0.6% of the world's data-centre capacity.

Africa's peace missions are still not paid for. African military spending rose to \$58.2 billion, while the African Union mission in Somalia lacks about \$70 million a year.

Ebola barely reached the speeches. The World Health Organization (WHO) counts 7,890 confirmed cases and 3,799 deaths, and no vaccine is approved for this type of Ebola.

Seven calls on what New York means

Open any judgement for the reason in one sentence.

<i>I</i>	The UN agreed words, while the money was raised elsewhere	+
<i>II</i>	Aid now comes as a contract with a price attached	+
<i>III</i>	Africa won the argument for Council seats and lost the process	+
<i>IV</i>	Africa's peace mission gap is small beside its military spending	+
<i>V</i>	Africa's largest emergencies were almost absent from the speeches	+
<i>VI</i>	The UN set up new bodies on AI, with no money	+
<i>VII</i>	Africa's next big deal is with its own savings and budgets	+

TWELVE SECTORS

The verdicts



01

CONFIDENCE: OBSERVED

Security and conflict

Africa's wars were discussed in side meetings with no money attached, while African armies grew and the African Union mission in Somalia ran short of cash.



02

CONFIDENCE: OBSERVED

Food and agriculture

Africa's hunger stopped rising in 2025 at the highest rate of any region, and the price of food, fertiliser and transport now decides who eats.



03

CONFIDENCE: OBSERVED

Livelihoods and labour

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

04 Health

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

Strong inference

05 Education

Governments in sub-Saharan Africa spend 3.6 times more on debt payments than on schools, so budgets now decide how far African children learn.

Observed

06 AI and technology

The UN has set up new bodies on artificial intelligence and funded none of them, while Africa's real limits are electricity and buyers who will commit to paying.

Strong inference

07 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.

Observed

08 Philanthropy

Philanthropy cannot replace lost aid, and its best use is to take the first risk so that Africa's own savings can be invested at home.

Strong inference

09 Climate and energy

Money to help Africa cope with climate change is shrinking, while Africa sells its minerals and carbon credits on terms it has not yet set.

Strong inference

10 Water

Most schools in sub-Saharan Africa lack basic water and toilets, a failure of national budgets that nothing agreed in New York will fix.

Observed

11 Politics and governance

Africa stays united on Security Council reform because its position never forces a choice between countries, while coups and unpunished killings at home weaken its case.

Observed

12 The UN and diplomacy

The UN is shrinking because its largest members do not pay, and Africa entered the one big decision of the year, the choice of the next Secretary-General, divided and with its own candidates trailing.

Observed

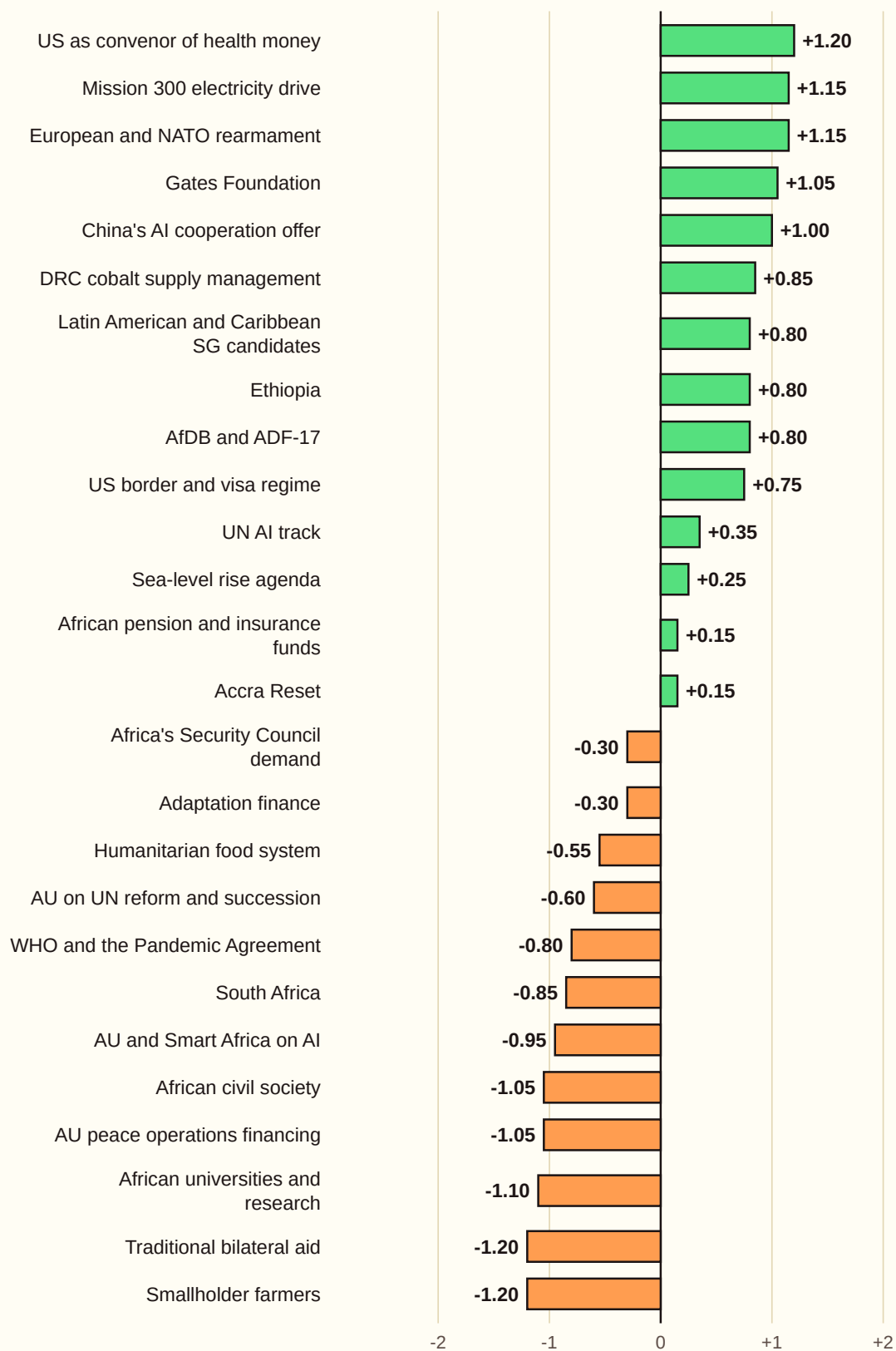
■ POWER AT UNGA81

Winners and losers

Each actor is scored from -2 to +2 on how much power it gained or lost at the Assembly. A high score records power gained and does not mean approval. The US border and visa rules score well because they set terms and enforced them, at Africa's cost.

Those who convened money gained, and those who relied on process lost

Weighted power score at UNGA81, from -2 (lost) to +2 (gained)



Weights: agenda 15%, capital 20%, rule-making 20%, coalition 15%, execution 20%, African option value 10%. Select a bar to open its sector briefing.

Source: [Scored from the evidence in each sector briefing](#)

What the world is refusing to see

Each issue is shown on four separate measures: how heavy the burden is, with its source, how much it matters for Africa's future, how much attention it received in New York and how much money moved. The class follows from those measures. The score multiplies the burden by the consequence and divides by attention, where high attention counts 3, medium to high 2.5, medium 2 and low 1. It helps to compare issues and makes no claim to be precise.

NEGLECTED A heavy burden, little attention in New York and no money moved.

VISIBLE BUT UNDER-SERVED Discussed in New York, with little or no money attached.

PRIORITY-CONCENTRATED Both attention and money arrived.

ISSUE	BURDEN	CONSEQUENCE	ATTENTION	MONEY MOVED	CLASS	SCORE
<u>El Niño over southern Africa</u>	A 70% chance that rain will be lower than in any El Niño year since 1950; the plan would reach 11.9 million people	High	Low	About \$89 million of the \$111.3 million plan has no funding	NEGLECTED	9
<u>The Bab al-Mandeb shipping route</u>	About 12% of world trade passes through the strait, and the Houthis now hold shores on both of its approaches	High	Low	None announced	NEGLECTED	9
<u>Health data in one-to-one US health deals</u>	35 agreements worth \$24.1 billion, some giving access to genetic data and data on viruses	High	Low	Money flows under the agreements, and there is no African standard for them	NEGLECTED	9

ISSUE	BURDEN	CONSEQUENCE	ATTENTION	MONEY MOVED	CLASS	SCORE
<u>Trained health workers without jobs</u>	94 3,000 trained health workers without jobs, while Africa will be 5.85 million short by 2030	High	Low	None announced	NEGLECTED	9
<u>Youth protests that turn into military rule</u>	11 successful coups since 2020; 53% of Africans would accept military rule if leaders abuse power	High	Low	None announced	NEGLECTED	9
<u>Savings locked in government debt</u>	About \$775 billion in pension and insurance funds; in Ghana, 85% of pension money is in government bills and bonds	High	Low	None announced	NEGLECTED	9
<u>Illegal fishing while ocean rules are rewritten</u>	West Africa had over 40% of recorded illegal fishing by industrial boats from 2010 to 2022	Medium to high	Low	None announced	NEGLECTED	7.5

ISSUE	BURDEN	CONSEQUENCE	ATTENTION	MONEY MOVED	CLASS	SCORE
<u>The cost of sending money home, and the new US tax</u>	Sending money to sub-Saharan Africa costs 8.46% of the amount; money sent from the United States to Kenya fell 12.6% in the first half of 2026	Medium to high	Low	None announced	NEGLECTED	7.5
<u>Kenya's bill on outsourced workers</u>	It makes outsourcing firms answer for workers' claims, which in effect shields the companies that hire them	High	Low	Not applicable	NEGLECTED	6
<u>African research</u>	88 researchers per million people in sub-Saharan Africa, against 1,486 worldwide	High	Low	Only AI certificates offered by technology firms	NEGLECTED	6
<u>Electricity grids and the finances of power companies</u>	Mission 300 connects about 25 million people a year, against the 55 million a year needed	High	Medium	A grids plan launched with no money	VISIBLE BUT UNDER-SERVED	4.5

ISSUE	BURDEN	CONSEQUENCE	ATTENTION	MONEY MOVED	CLASS	SCORE
<u>Money to adapt to climate change</u>	\$26 billion a year flows, against needs of \$310 billion or more by 2035	High	High	No new pledges	VISIBLE BUT UNDER-SERVED	3
<u>Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo</u>	7,890 confirmed cases and 3,799 deaths by 23 September	High	Medium	\$2.997 billion through a group of countries called together by the United States	PRIORITY-CONCENTRATED	4.5

Four scenarios for 2027 and 2028

The scenarios describe which logic dominates. They can coexist, and the probabilities are judgements to be revised each quarter.

Slow breakdown, with crises contained

35%



Rules survive on paper, and crises are contained. Money and attention arrive only in emergencies.

WATCH

The declaration on pandemics returning to the Assembly before December; any use by the Security Council of its 2023 decision to fund African missions, Resolution 2719, before the end of 2028; the UN peacekeeping budget in June 2027.

DANGER FOR AFRICA

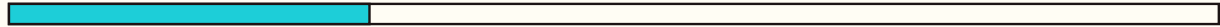
Long crises become normal, and health, school and welfare systems wear down.

OPENING FOR AFRICA

Shared insurance, joint buying and money raised at home, built by Africans for Africa.

Deal by deal

30%



Groups of countries, conveners and deals between two governments set the terms, one issue at a time.

WATCH

More US health agreements; the second UN dialogue on AI on 3 and 4 May 2027; debt deals through the group of borrowing countries known as the Borrowers' Club.

DANGER FOR AFRICA

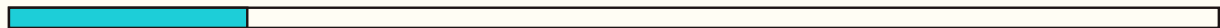
Deals are struck country by country, and the weakest are left out.

OPENING FOR AFRICA

Common African standards turn 54 separate negotiations into one position.

Rival blocs

20%



Rival groups of countries harden, spend more on defence and control their supply chains.

WATCH

Members of the NATO military alliance moving towards spending 5% of national income on defence; limits on exports of computer chips; rounds of new tariffs; disruption to shipping in the Red Sea and the Strait of Hormuz.

DANGER FOR AFRICA

Borrowing becomes expensive, outside powers compete through local proxies, and Africa splits.

OPENING FOR AFRICA

Selling minerals, votes and shipping routes to more than one bloc on better terms.

Renewed cooperation

15%

Some tensions ease, real debt relief arrives, and global funds are refilled. Budgets for shared problems such as pandemics are protected again.

WATCH

The declaration on pandemics adopted with money attached; a mandate to start treaty talks on autonomous weapons at the Geneva review conference in November 2026; the first pledges to the UN fund for AI; debt deals that cut payments; markets accepting ratings from the African Credit Rating Agency after its launch on 7 October 2026.

DANGER FOR AFRICA

A return of grants invites a return to dependence on them, and African institutions built in the lean years are left to wither.

OPENING FOR AFRICA

Lock gains into African institutions while money is available: the Peace Fund, Africa CDC, the African Credit Rating Agency and joint buying.

Four moves make sense in all four futures. The first is a common African standard for deals in which governments share the cost. The second is joint buying of cloud computing, medicines and fertiliser. The third is guarantees that let pension funds invest at home. The fourth is African money for African peace missions. The riskiest plan is any that assumes grants from single donor governments will return, because only the least likely future supports it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The action agenda

Every recommendation opens a page on who leads, who contributes and what each audience can do. Choose an audience to see the actions that name it.

Within 30 days

30 DAYS · BY 28 OCTOBER 2026

CONTINENTAL

Agree one African list of demands for the next UN Secretary-General

Leads: The AU Commission and the Committee of Ten, with the African Group; the DRC, Liberia and Somalia as the first negotiators

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

30 DAYS · BY 28 OCTOBER 2026

REGIONAL

Pay for southern Africa's El Niño plan with African money before the rains fail

Leads: The SADC secretariat and African foundations, with the African Development Bank holding the money; Zimbabwe and Mozambique go first

Within 30 days to 1 year

30 DAYS TO 1 YEAR · BY 28 OCTOBER 2026 (ZIMBABWE); FEBRUARY 2027 (AFRICAN UNION)

CONTINENTAL

Tie mineral export rules to proof that processing plants are being built

Leads: The AMDC and the African Union Commission; Zimbabwe's Ministry of Mines as the first country to apply the standard

Within 100 days

100 DAYS · BY EARLY JANUARY 2027

CONTINENTAL

Close the Somalia mission's funding gap with African money before UN supplies stop

Leads: The AU Peace and Security Council with IGAD; Somalia and the six troop-sending countries as first movers

100 DAYS · BY EARLY JANUARY 2027

REGIONAL

Keep grain trade open in southern Africa and buy before the hungry months

Leads: SADC ministers of agriculture and trade, with Zambia's Ministry of Agriculture going first

100 DAYS · BY EARLY JANUARY 2027

CONTINENTAL

Publish every government agreement with large technology firms, using one African standard

Leads: The AU Commission, with Kenya as the first country

100 DAYS · BY THE WATER CONFERENCE, 8 TO 10 DECEMBER 2026

CONTINENTAL

Bring one costed African plan for school water and toilets to Abu Dhabi

Leads: AMCOW with the AU Commission; Senegal's water ministry goes first

100 DAYS · BY EARLY JANUARY 2027

NATIONAL, WITH CONTINENTAL COMPARISON

Make sending money home to Africa cheaper, and publish what every route costs

Leads: Central banks decide for their own countries; the African Institute for Remittances compares costs; SADC, the East African Community and PAPSS align the rules

100 DAYS · BY FEBRUARY 2027 AU SUMMIT

CONTINENTAL

Keep asking for permanent seats, and win smaller Security Council gains now

Leads: The Committee of Ten and the AU Commission, carried by the African Group; the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia and Zimbabwe as first users

Within 1 year

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

1 YEAR · BY SEPTEMBER 2027

CONTINENTAL

Buy government cloud and AI services together across Africa, under one open agreement

Leads: The AU Commission and Smart Africa, with Nigeria as the first country

1 YEAR · BY 2027/28 BUDGETS

NATIONAL, WITH CONTINENTAL COMPARISON

Write a legal minimum for school spending into every national debt plan

Leads: National finance ministries decide; the AU Commission's education department and the APRM compare results; Sierra Leone goes first

1 YEAR · BY 2027 FINANCE BILLS

NATIONAL, COMPARED ACROSS AFRICA

Give tax relief for gifts to audited local charities, and compare rules across Africa

Leads: National treasuries decide; ATAF compares; SADC, the East African Community and ECOWAS bring the rules into line

1 YEAR · BY 3 MAY 2027 DIALOGUE

CONTINENTAL

Agree one African position on how the UN's AI fund is run

Leads: The AU Commission, with Gabon and Senegal as the first countries and the African Group in New York

1 YEAR · BY 20 NOVEMBER 2026 (COP31), THEN JUNE 2027

CONTINENTAL

Agree one African minimum price for carbon credits sold to other countries

Leads: AUDA-NEPAD and the African Group of Negotiators; Ghana's Carbon Market Office as the first country to apply the price

1 YEAR · BY SEPTEMBER 2027

REGIONAL

Share ship-tracking data and create African war-risk insurance for Red Sea trade

Leads: IGAD and the African signatories of the Djibouti Code, with ATIDI and the African Development Bank; Djibouti and Kenya as first contributors

Within 2 years

2 YEARS · BY SEPTEMBER 2028

CONTINENTAL

Build an African guarantee fund so pension savings can be invested at home

Leads: The AfDB with ATIDI and Africa50, with foundations providing first-loss money; national regulators keep the power to approve, with Nigeria and Kenya first

2 YEARS · BY SEPTEMBER 2028

CONTINENTAL

Pay first salaries for jobless nurses and midwives while governments take over

Leads: WHO's Africa office under the Charter, with African foundations and public development lenders; Kenya and Zambia go first

2 YEARS · BY SEPTEMBER 2028

REGIONAL

Build shared regional stores of grain and fertiliser, paid for by Africa

Leads: SADC and ECOWAS, with the African Development Bank; Zambia and Nigeria go first

What do you think?

Comment on the whole briefing, or select any words on any page to highlight, comment on or share them. Comments are read by a person before they appear.

How this was made: Speeches were treated as evidence of position. Every claim about delivery was tested against money, negotiated text, votes, appointments or follow-through. [Read the method, the limits and the image credits.](#)

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Words used on this page

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. [Glossary](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

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](#) · [Glossary](#)

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](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: 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](#) · [Glossary](#)

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](#) · [Glossary](#)