CHAPTER 5

Economic Community of Central African States and African Agency Towards Global Powers

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Introduction

The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)[1] occupies a considered position within Africa's regional integration architecture. As one of the African Union's eight recognised Regional Economic Communities (RECs), ECCAS serves as a main platform through which Central African states pursue economic integration, peacebuilding, regional security, and international cooperation. Its engagement with external powers has become increasingly important in a global environment characterised by renewed geopolitical competition, shifting partnership dynamics, and growing demands for regional agency, as part of the Africanisation of "*African solutions to African problems*" (Muchie et al. 2016, Muritala et al. 2018).

Established through the Libreville Treaty of 1983, ECCAS emerged from earlier efforts to promote economic cooperation among Central African countries, building on the earlier Central African Customs and Economic Union (UDEAC), created in 1964. Since then, the organisation has been required to foster political dialogue, facilitate regional integration, strengthen collective security mechanisms, and improve socioeconomic development across member states. Despite these ambitions, progress has often been constrained by persistent structural challenges, including political instability, armed conflicts, weak infrastructure, limited institutional capacity, and overlapping regional commitments.

Since the 1990s, ECCAS countries have invoked the importance of forging close economic cooperation and regional integration to enhance growth and development, overcome the barriers of political fragmentation and increase regional competitiveness with the rest of the world (CEEAC-ECCAS 2023a).[2] In trying to reach these objectives, ECCAS member states are engaged in the construction of sub-regional mechanisms[3] based on the development of physical, monetary and economic integration. Most of these efforts have involved integrating national and regional priorities amid competing demands and expectations. Despite the broad consensus on the benefits of integration, there has been a mixed record of national commitments to external powers and institutions. Most ECCAS member countries have, thus, been greatly relying on these commitments to achieve not only their national objectives, but also the regional goals such as those set out in the regional Vision 2025 adopted in 2007.[4]

Over the last two decades, ECCAS has increasingly engaged with a diverse range of external actors, including the European Union, China, the United States, Russia, Türkiye, multilateral development banks, and United Nations agencies. These partnerships have provided important opportunities for investment, infrastructure development, security cooperation, and technical assistance. At the same time, they have raised important questions regarding dependency, bargaining power, and the capacity of Central African states to shape external engagements in ways that advance regional priorities.

This chapter examines how ECCAS navigates these relationships and assesses the extent to which the organisation contributes to strengthening African agency in engagements with global powers. Rather than portraying ECCAS merely as a recipient of external assistance, the chapter analyses the organisation as an evolving regional actor seeking to balance external partnerships with regional interests and long-term development goals.

The geographical and geopolitical context of central Africa

The study focusses on the ECCAS zone, a large geographical area stretching from the desert landscapes of Northern Chad to the tropical rainforests and mountainous regions in the equatorial part of Southern

Congo. This region encompasses a surface area of 6 667 017 square kilometres and a population estimated at 229.4 million in 2023. It is geographically positioned along the Atlantic Ocean, with the coastline extending 3 000 kilometres from its southwest boundary (Cilliers 2024). The region covers the equator and includes the Congo Basin, which is the second largest rainforest in the world, after the Amazon.

ECCAS occupies a pivotal position within Africa's geopolitical landscape, attributable to its considerable natural resource allocations, strategic geographical positioning and the complex interplay of internal and external dynamics. ECCAS is uniquely positioned as the only REC in Africa that shares borders with almost all other RECs, such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to the West, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to the Northeast, the South African Development Community (SADC) to the South, the East African Community (EAC) to the East and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) through Chad and Libya. This central position places ECCAS at the crossroads of continental diplomacy, trade corridors and transnational security threats, while also complicating institutional coherence due to overlapping regional commitments. Many ECCAS member states (*Map 1*) hold dual or multiple memberships in other RECs, reflecting the challenge of regionalism: Cameroon; Chad; Central African Republic; Congo; Gabon and Equatorial Guinea are also affiliated with *Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale* (Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa) (CEMAC). The Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi are both members of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and ECCAS, with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) additionally engaged in the SADC. Rwanda and Burundi are allied with the EAC. Chad belongs to the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) and initiatives focussing on the Sahel (G5 Sahel). These overlapping affiliations, while offering diplomatic flexibility, frequently lead to fragmentation, duplication of resources and conflicting duties, hindering the prospects for unified economic integration and cohesive security strategies as well as sustainable development in a region with huge reserves of hydrocarbons and various minerals, such as diamond, gold, cobalt, copper and iron.

ECCAS member states collectively possess approximately 31.3 billion barrels of proven crude oil reserves located notably in Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the DRC, and accounting for about 28 per cent of Africa's reserve (ISS African Futures 2024; UN Trade and Development [UNCTAD] 2023). North Africa leads with an estimated 64 billion barrels, representing roughly 51 per cent of Africa's total reserves. West Africa follows with approximately 38 billion barrels, making up about 30 per cent of the continent's reserves. According to Williams (2025), Central Africa, with its Congo Basin, is the world's second-largest rainforest after the Amazon, playing a crucial role in global carbon sequestration. The region is also, through the DRC the leading global producer of cobalt and copper (essential minerals for modern technologies and the green energy transition) in the world with approximately 220 000 metric tons produced for the DRC only in 2024, before countries like Indonesia with around 28 000 metric tons, Russia 8 700 metric tons and Canada with 4 500 metric tons (to name a few) the same year. ECCAS also appears to be the continent's fifth biggest water reservoir, which gives it the highest hydroelectricity potential in the region. The Inga Dams comprised two single dams: the Inga 1 (351 MW) and Inga II (1 424 MW) are located in the DRC, with the capacity of 1 775 MW, behind the Gilgel Gibe III Dam (1 870 MW) in Ethiopia, Cahora Basa Dam (2 070 MW) in Mozambique or the Aswan High dam (2 100 MW) in Egypt. The region is characterised by a varied climate, vegetation and population density, and policymaking and informal rules of politics appear quite prominent in a vast territory bigger than the EU (Mehlu 2019). These resources position ECCAS as a key player in global markets, particularly concerning energy and environmental sustainability.

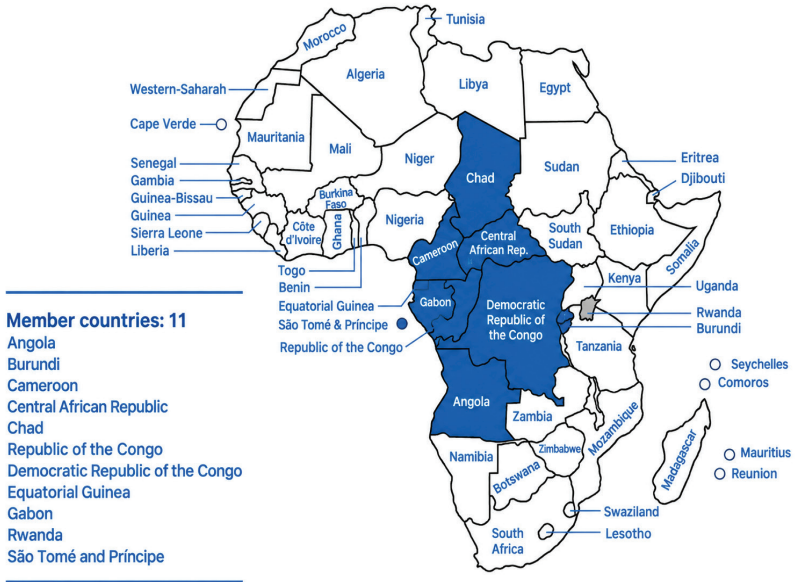


Figure 5.1: Map of Africa representing ECCAS countries. Source: 1st Fiduciary (2022: 1).

The main regional institutions are the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC, the successor to UDEAC), ECCAS, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC). Chad and the Central African Republic are also members of CEN-SAD. CEMAC's six member countries form a customs union and have a common currency (CFA franc) and a macroeconomic policy convergence mechanism. Burundi and Rwanda are active in the EAC, Angola and the DRC are also members of the SADC and Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda are members of the COMESA. CEMAC and ECCAS resolved to harmonise at the 13th Conference of ECCAS Heads of State and Government, held in Brazzaville in October 2007. Thus, a rationalised piloting committee (the *Comité de pilotage de la rationalisation des communautés économiques régionales en Afrique Centrale (COPIL/CER-AC))* was established that includes representatives of CEMAC, ECCAS, the AU, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), and the African Development Bank (African Development Bank 2019a). ECCAS has

since initiated an internal reform process with a view to becoming more efficient and better able to fulfil its missions.

Methodology

This chapter adopts a qualitative research design combining documentary analysis with semi-structured expert interviews. Primary data were collected during an online field mission in Libreville, Gabon, where few interviews were undertaken with senior officials, technical experts, and representatives of relevant departments facilitated by Mrs Rachel Mbako, Cooperation and Resource Management Director of ECCAS. These interviews provided valuable insights into ECCAS's institutional priorities, engagement strategies, and perceptions of relations with external powers.

Secondary data were drawn from official ECCAS documents, African Union publications, policy reports, academic literature, development partner assessments, and international databases. The triangulation of interview evidence and documentary sources enabled a comprehensive assessment of ECCAS's external engagements across political, economic, security, and development dimensions. In particular, it looks at ECCAS' foreign policy structures and approaches to engagement with external powers. Five elements of ECCAS's engagement are especially considered: (1) ECCAS's strategic plan, foreign policy, and engagement with global powers; (2) political and governance engagements; (3) communication and media perspective; (4) civil society organisations; (5) opportunities and recommendations. Beside assessing the progress made towards putting these instruments into operation, the report discusses problems and challenges that currently hamper and limit ECCAS's performance across all fields.

Globally, this chapter is part of a series of studies on the existing and emerging abilities of African agency towards global, or key external powers, conducted within the African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS), in its project on '*African Agency Toward Global Powers',* aiming at mapping the continent's engagement with external powers. Specific deliverables for this assignment are a mapping and scoping report

which provides an inventory of ECCAS's engagement with main global powers; a summary of various strategies and processes; a synthesis of approaches and methodologies used; a synthesis of lessons learnt in terms of successes and failures *vis-à-vis* economic development and investments in areas of activity which an overarching framework and programmes.

This multidimensional approach facilitates a holistic understanding of how ECCAS positions itself within an increasingly competitive international environment.

Overview of ECCAS's strategic plan, foreign policy and engagement with global powers

This section examines the experiences of ECCAS towards engagement with external powers, highlighting the key strategies, policy actions, as well as opportunities and challenges. In examining their historical background, engagements and performances, the analysis aims to enhance Africa's approach to, and engagement with these powers.

ECCAS's strategic plan

ECCAS has recently developed a comprehensive strategy document that falls under its Strategic Plan (SP) for 2021-2025. Before the SP, its regional development agenda was under its founding Treaty, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and the "Recovery and Revitalisation Programme" adopted by Heads of States and Governments in 1999 in Malabo, after the decision to reactivate ECCAS taken in February 1998 in Libreville, Gabon. The recent SP appears in a context marked by the ECCAS's determination to promote cooperation and strengthen regional integration in all areas of political, security, economic, monetary, financial, social, cultural, scientific and technical activity, with a view to achieving collective autonomy, raising people's standard of living, increasing and maintaining economic stability, strengthening and preserving close peaceful relations between its member states and contributing to the progress and development of the African continent (CEEAC-ECCAS 2021). The ECCAS's SP is structured around the

vision of living "a common future, in an environment of peace, security and stability, ensured by sustainable development, good governance, the growing improvement of living conditions of freedom and justice" (CEEAC-ECCAS 2021). The SP addresses six priority areas which are as per the below.

Political integration, peace and security are considered as prerequisites for the region to achieve its integration that generates harmonious socio-economic development. Within the period 2021–2025, political integration for peace and security in the region aims to facilitate legislative and institutional convergence in political governance between member states and harmonise their positions on political issues and in international forums, with a view of making the ECCAS region as an area of peace and stability.

Economic and financial integration aims to promote the harmonious socio-economic development of the region through a process of economic integration, the establishment of a common market and the free movement of goods, capital and services.

Environmental integration, agriculture and rural development, aims to preserve living conditions for future generations in order to guarantee sustainable development, increase productivity and competitiveness significantly and sustainably to ensure food security and access to regional and international markets.

Regional physical integration aims to strengthen the link that materialises the sense of common space, gives concrete form to the establishment of the common market in the regional space and guarantees the free movement of people, goods and services.

Human and social integration of the member states of Central Africa is to create conditions aimed at eliminating poverty in all its forms, ensuring that every citizen can live in good health, have equitable access to quality education and acquire technical, scientific and cultural knowledge in an environment where gender equality and equity are ensured. Within this framework, social and human integration is being developed along eight strategic areas, including: (1) health; (2) social affairs; (3) culture; (4) employment; (5) sport; (6) gender; (7) education, training, science, technology and innovation; (8) youth.

Institutional reform is the last area that aims to set up other ECCAS's bodies, institutions and mechanisms, as well as the revision of the legal and regulatory framework of ECCAS in the light of changes in the continental and international context and the mandate of ECCAS as a pillar of the AU and international context as well as ECCAS's mandate as a pillar of the AU within the framework of African integration.

Importantly, this strategic plan is based, among other things, on the mobilization of resources from its development, strategic and financial partners (CEEAC-ECCAS 2021).

ECCAS's foreign policy agenda and instruments

ECCAS's foreign policy outlines the vital areas in which it intends to explore its relations with the outside world. Its key approach is promoting and diversifying partnerships, and seeking financing to support the socio-economic development of its member states based on certain pilot sectors, notably agro-industry, infrastructure and energy. Since launching its activities in 1985, ECCAS has been engaging with global powers by promoting and achieving harmonious cooperation, balanced and self-reliant development in all areas of economic and social activity, with a view to achieving economic stability and contributing towards the progress and development of the African continent (ECCAS Treaty 1983). Since 2000, this goal has been extended to the promotion of peace and security. According to Article 106 of the Revised ECCAS Treaty (2019: 57), the Community shall maintain a common position with other international organisations and external partners in support of its regional integration objectives.

ECCAS's foreign policy agenda

ECCAS's founding treaty pledges member states to develop regional integration across political, security, economic and social fields. Its long-standing framework, adopted as Vision 2025 in 2007, envisages "*a common future, in an environment of peace, security and stability, ensured by sustainable development, good governance, [and] improving living conditions of citizens,*

freedom and justice" (Vision 2025: 12). Practically, heads of states and governments have defined six essential pillars for integration: political/peace; economic/financial integration; infrastructure; environmental initiatives; social development and institutional reforms, to actualise this aspirational vision. The strategic plan for 2016-2025, also referred to as Vision 2025, alongside subsequent Medium-Term Plan (PSIMT 2021-2025), reaffirms these objectives. As such, ECCAS endeavours to form a comprehensive common market characterised by the free movement of goods, services and people, ultimately leading to a customs union and a unified external tariff. In its foreign policy agenda, ECCAS maintains a multipronged foreign policy of diversifying partnerships (CEEAC-ECCAS 2023a). This acknowledgement highlights the importance of creating and promoting relationships beyond its immediate borders in sectors including:

- *Foreign Direct Investment*: Between 2020 and 2024, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) trends in Africa, especially within the ECCAS region, highlighted global unpredictability and regional imbalances. After a steep decline due to COVID-19 in 2020, FDI in Africa bounced back to around US$ 80 billion in 2021, with countries like Angola and the DRC within the ECCAS area seeing moderate benefits. However, this recovery was short-lived; in 2022, FDI plummeted to US$ 45 billion, with ECCAS countries experiencing stagnant or decreasing inflows. Angola even faced net outflows, and the DRC remained steady at US$ 1.8 billion. Conversely, ECOWAS and SADC nations performed better. By 2023, although African FDI as a whole stabilised at US$ 53 billion, Central Africa suffered another 17 per cent drop in inflows. Early figures for 2024 show an impressive 84 per cent increase across the continent to US$ 94 billion, largely driven by a project in Egypt; even without it, Africa experienced a 23 per cent boost. Specific data for the ECCAS region in 2024 are sparse; however, preliminary signs indicate only a slight recovery, falling behind West and Southern Africa in attracting enduring FDI growth

(UNCTAD 2023), where ECCAS member states prioritise securing FDI for infrastructure development. For instance, the region has attracted about US$ 306.5 billion in 2023 (UNCTAD 2022); while in 2021, China invested over US$ 2.6 billion in infrastructure projects in the Republic of Congo, approximately US$ 2.64 billion in Angola, US$ 4.3 billion in Gabon, more than US$ 240 million for Equatorial Guinea, approximately US$ 98 million for Chad and more than US$ 56 million concessional loan for the Bugesera International Airport Road project in Rwanda. These investments included the construction of highways, airports and energy facilities (AIDDATA 2021).

- *Peace and Security:* ECCAS collaborates with global powers to stabilise conflict zones, particularly in countries like the Central African Republic (CAR) and the DRC. These external powers have, thus, been playing a significant role in shaping peace and security dynamics in the region, particularly in the conflict-ridden areas such as Eastern DRC, where the UN peacekeeping mission, United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), has been a central actor that deployed an intervention brigade in 2013 to combat the M23 armed group. The EU has been contributing through activities such as the Security Sector Reforms (SSR) and training missions, while the SADC has provided regional support. Despite these external interventions, the region continues to grapple with instability, highlighting the complex interplay of local and international actors in its pursuit of lasting peace. In CAR, the UN peacekeeping mission United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) involves over 13 000 troops, with contributions from France, the US and the EU aimed at maintaining peace and supporting governance reforms.
- *Sustainable resource management:* ECCAS is focussed on ensuring that global powers engaging in resource extraction

(like China and France) adhere to sustainable practices. For example, Congo-Brazzaville renegotiated contracts with Chinese companies in 2020 to ensure more equitable sharing of oil revenues. Some Gulf states, including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia, have significantly expanded their economic and diplomatic engagements in Central Africa in recent years, focussing on resource extraction, infrastructure development, and sustainability initiatives.

- *Regional integration and economic growth:* ECCAS has been actively pursuing a range of efforts to enhance regional integration and economic development. Though ECCAS did not negotiate a collective economic partnership agreement with the EU,[5] it has instead been working closely with international institutions, including the EU and World Bank, on initiatives to enhance economic cooperation and integration within Central Africa. In 2021, the EU allocated € 80 million to support ECCAS regional integration projects, including improving trade corridors and upgrading border infrastructure (European Commission 2022).

Qatar for instance, has initiated investments in Central African countries as a form of trade for their stance to diversify investment locations and explore new opportunities. It has, thus, recently emerged as a new major player in the region, allowing it to participate in political mediations in Chad, the DRC and Rwanda, where it actively developed ties since 2023, when the US announced the arrival of Rwandan opposition figure Paul Rusesabagina in Doha after Kagame had granted him amnesty, pardoning him from a 25-year prison sentence. Rusesabagina's release came as a result of a deal mediated by Qatar, by Emir Tamim personally, between the governments of the US and Rwanda (Yasser 2023). It also acquired a 49 per cent stake in RwandAir through Qatar Airways and invested with 60 per cent in a US$ 1.3 billion project in the construction of a new international airport near Kigali, aiming to establish a regional aviation hub. In the DRC, Qatar has shown interest in mining, communications and cybersecurity sectors, with high-level discussions between President

Tshisekedi and Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani emphasising the need for a favourable business climate to support these initiatives. These investments are part of Qatar's broader strategy to enhance connectivity and economic ties within Africa.

The UAE has also positioned itself as a major investor in the region, with significant investments in mining and infrastructure. For instance, a deal of about US$ 1.9 billion was signed with the DRC in 2023, following an agreement with firm Primera Group in 2022 on export rights for artisanal mined ores (Gower 2023). Also, UAE-based companies like DP World and AD Ports Group have secured concessions to develop and operate key seaports and inland ports across Africa, including in the DRC and Congo-Brazzaville, enhancing trade routes and logistics.

Globally, Gulf states are becoming influential partners in Central Africa, combining economic investments with strategic infrastructure projects. While these arrangements offer development opportunities, they also highlight the importance of sustainable and diversified partnerships to ensure long-term benefits for the region.

ECCAS foreign policy instruments

A range of instruments to achieve these goals, including diplomatic initiatives, economic policies, security measures, and environmental strategies. ECCAS countries use several diplomatic strategies to assert their interests globally, including:

- *Multilateral engagement:* Actively participating in international forums, for example, the UN, AU, Africa-France (held in Montpellier on 8 October 2021); Russia-Africa (participated in Russia-Africa summits, including the second summit held in St. Petersburg in July 2023, during which, ECCAS and Russia signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen their partnership), BRICS Summits (participated in the fifteenth BRICS Summit hosted by South Africa from 22–24 August 2023, which brought together leaders from BRICS countries, along with representatives of RECs, including ECCAS). This

engagement aims to shape global agendas on trade, security and climate change. Though ECCAS does not negotiate directly at EU-Africa summits, its member states help shape the joint priorities set by the AU and the EU.

- *Strategic partnerships:* Forming alliances with global powers that align with their strategic interests (for example, China, EU, India for infrastructure development, France, the US, Russia for security cooperation) (Afreximbank 2023, 2024). The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between ECCAS and Russia on 28 July 2023, on the principles of cooperation between the two parties.
- *Advocacy and lobbyin*g: Engaging in targeted lobbying efforts to promote specific policy goals, such as debt relief, climate finance and fair-trade agreements (ECCAS Secretariat 2020).

Foreign policy decisions within ECCAS are formulated by the ECCAS Commission, guided by the Council of Ministers and approved by the Heads of State and Government Conference. These bodies set the overall direction and priorities for regional engagement with global powers.

Key decision-makers in foreign policy formulation include the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of member states, the ECCAS Commission, and Heads of State. Influencers include national governments, international organisations, civil society, and global partners (ECCAS Secretariat 2020). Most of its member states have exhibited impressive foreign policy activities in the areas of parliamentary diplomacy, agenda setting and programme formulation, affecting the region and the continental system. ECCAS has been collaborating with the EU on issues related to peace and security. For instance, in March 2021, senior officials from the EU, AU, UN and ECCAS conducted a virtual meeting with the President of the CAR, Touadéra, to examine the political circumstances and peace initiatives in the country. For instance, ECCAS, through its headquarters in Libreville, has accredited Türkiye's embassy since 2013. This diplomatic relationship aims to facilitate cooperation in areas such as infrastructure development and education, contributing to ECCAS's regional integration efforts.

Global powers figuring in ECCAS's foreign policy plans

Alongside the implementation of measures to strengthen development mechanisms, ECCAS indicates in Article 106 of its revised Treaty signed in 2019 that the "*institution could increase its financial sustainability through greater mobilisation of resources from multilateral co-operation with various external powers*". This is a need that the ECCAS seems to have taken into account when formulating its Medium-Term Indicative Strategic Plan (2021-2025). The Plan clearly states the necessity for ECCAS to engage with key external development partners (point 5.2 of the Plan). These strategic partners were to be determined by the commission.

However, key external actors operating in the region are mainly identified within the *group of ECCAS's friends* made up of about eleven countries: the *US*, Russia, Japan, China, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, Turkey, Egypt and Morocco; and five representatives of international organisations: the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), the AU and the EU. Other organisations, such as the African Development Bank Group, the World Bank, and the UN specialised agencies, are also counted among the main external actors that operate in Central Africa's regional development and integration processes. All these external actors engage with the community's development projects through mechanisms such as the Official Development Assistance (ODA), or the Compensation, Cooperation and Development Fund of ECCAS (FCCD-AC), that operate in different domains, including transport, energy, water, information and communication technologies, peace and security, environment, etc.

ECCAS sectoral policies and engagements

Politics and governance

ECCAS's political and governance structures are designed to foster cooperation among member states, manage regional conflicts and guide

economic development. In terms of politics and governance, the region is lagging, which weakens the effectiveness of institutions and reduces the impact of public policies on development.

Diplomatic and political engagements with global powers

The diplomatic strategies of ECCAS member states reveal a pragmatic approach to international engagement. Rather than relying on a single external partner, they increasingly diversify their diplomatic relations between traditional and emerging powers from the Global South. This diversification reflects both a search for development opportunities and an effort to reduce excessive dependence on any single partner.

At the regional level, ECCAS continues to face institutional limitations in projecting a unified diplomatic voice. Unlike organisations such as the EU, ECCAS does not maintain extensive diplomatic representation abroad and largely relies on the foreign ministries of member states to advance collective interests.

Table 5.1: Summarises the data on global powers' engagements with ECCAS countries. Source: Adapted from Afreximbank (2023, 2024); African Economic Outlook (2024); EU Commission (2022); USAID (2022); US Department of Commerce (2022); US Department of State (2021).

External Power	Focus Areas	Key Instruments/ Initiatives	Examples
EU	Governance reforms, economic development, trade, peace, security	Cotonou Agreement, European Development Fund (EDF), Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), European Peace Facility	- Governance reforms and electoral support in Cameroon, Chad, Gabon - Duty-free access to EU markets
China	Infrastructure development, resource extraction, debt diplomacy, cultural diplomacy	Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), infrastructure financing, confucius institutes	- Infrastructure projects in the DRC, Congo-Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea - Confucius Institutes
US	Security cooperation, counterterrorism, trade, democratic governance, humanitarian aid	AFRICOM, Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), USAID	Counterterrorism operations in Chad, Cameroon, CAR - USAID support for civil society and healthcare

External Power	Focus Areas	Key Instruments/ Initiatives	Examples
Russia	Security and military cooperation, resource extraction, geopolitical influence	Private military contractors (for example, Wagner Group), mining concessions, Russia-Africa Summit	- Security support and mining concessions in CAR and the DRC - Military training in CAR
India	Development cooperation, trade, technology transfer, education	India-Africa Forum Summit, Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC), pharmaceuticals, agribusiness	- Pharmaceutical exports to Cameroon, Chad, Congo - Scholarships and training programmes via ITEC
Brazil	South-South cooperation, agriculture, renewable energy, climate agenda	EMBRAPA (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation), renewable energy investments	- Biofuel production in the Congo - Agricultural productivity improvements in Cameroon
Turkey	Infrastructure development, trade, education, cultural diplomacy	Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit, bilateral trade agreements, educational scholarships, Turkish cultural centres	- Construction of airports, hospitals in Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea - Educational scholarships

The lack of a regional diplomatic strategy can be explained by the fact that many ECCAS member states are hesitant to delegate authority to the regional institution for negotiation on their behalf, due to concerns over institutional weakness and national sovereignty. Historical conflicts and mutual suspicions among some neighbouring countries (DRC vs

Rwanda) have fostered an environment where states prefer to manage external relations independently, fearing that collective agreements might compromise their autonomy or favour rival nations. The diplomatic relations between ECCAS and global powers may instead reveal a dynamic interplay of economic, security and geopolitical interests. The EU, China, US, Russia, India, Brazil and Turkey have each carved out strategic footholds in the region, driven by diverse agendas. While some powers focus on infrastructure development and trade, others prioritise security cooperation and natural resource extraction. ECCAS countries, in turn, benefit from the competition among these powers; however, they also face challenges related to governance, debt sustainability and foreign dependency. This evolving diplomatic landscape offers both opportunities and risks for Central Africa's development and regional integration efforts.

Table 5.2: Diplomatic representation of external powers in ECCAS countries. Source: Adapted from countries' foreign affairs ministries websites (2024).

Country	France	China	US	Russia	EU	Turkey
Angola	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
Burundi	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
Cameroon	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
CAR	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	N/A
Chad	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
Congo (Brazzaville)	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
DRC (Kinshasa)	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
Equatorial Guinea	Embassy	Embassy	N/A	N/A	Delegation	Embassy
Gabon	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
Rwanda	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Embassy	Delegation	Embassy
São Tomé and Príncipe	N/A	Embassy	N/A	N/A	Delegation	N/A

The table reveals varying levels of diplomatic presence among global powers in ECCAS countries. The EU and China lead with a presence in eleven countries, reflecting their extensive deployment. However, the distribution of diplomatic missions reflects each global power's strategic interests and priorities in ECCAS countries. France's extensive presence underscores its historical ties and ongoing influence in the region, particularly in former colonies. China's broad diplomatic reach is aligned with its BRI, emphasising economic investments and infrastructure development. The US's targeted presence in key countries highlights its focus on security and counterterrorism, while Russia's presence in the CAR illustrates its growing role in regional security and resource extraction. The EU's wide representation indicates a commitment to development and stability, while Turkey's expanding network reflects its increasing interest in economic and cultural diplomacy. The gaps in representation for the US and Russia in certain countries suggest varying levels of strategic interest and engagement.

São Tomé and Príncipe maintains diplomatic relations with several global powers, including China, France, the US and Turkey, highlighting its strategic interests and historical links. Nonetheless, not all nations have established embassies within the country. This can be attributable to São Tomé and Príncipe's small size, its limited economic influence and the high expenditures related to operating diplomatic missions. Consequently, many countries employ non-resident ambassadors or depend on regional embassies to handle diplomatic affairs, thus, balancing international engagement with financial limitations. This strategy enables nations to preserve essential diplomatic connections without incurring the expense of maintaining a comprehensive embassy presence.

ECCAS, however, does not possess independent diplomatic representations in major global powers such as France, China, the US, Russia, the EU or Turkey. Rather, ECCAS interacts with these powers predominantly via multilateral forums as noted above, and through the diplomatic channels of its member states. The lack of individual ECCAS diplomatic missions in major global capitals is primarily due to resource constraints and the organisation's current focus on regional integration and peace and security. Globally, ECCAS countries employ a multifaceted

diplomatic approach to navigate their international relations, reflecting their strategic priorities and regional needs (*Table 3*).

By forging strategic alliances and partnerships with major global powers such as China, the EU, and the US, ECCAS nations secure economic aid and development support crucial for their growth. Their multilateral engagements within organisations like the UN and AU enhance regional cooperation and stability, enabling them to address shared challenges collectively.

Table 5.3: Political strategies used by ECCAS countries. Source: Adapted from Afreximbank (2023, 2024); African Export-Import Bank (2024); EU Commission (2015, 2021, 2022, 2024); USAID (2020, 2022, 2023); US Department of Commerce (2022); US Department of State (2021).

Diplomatic Strategy	Countries Involved	Purpose	Examples
Strategic Alliances and Partnerships	China, EU, US, Russia	Economic aid, military support, development projects	Bilateral agreements with China for infrastructure development.
Multilateral Engagements	UN, AU, ECCAS	Joint initiatives, peacekeeping missions, policy coordination	ECCAS's involvement in AU-led peacekeeping operations.
Economic Engagement	Various global powers	Attracting foreign investment, trade deals, economic aid	Trade agreements with the EU, economic partnerships with the US.
Security and Military Cooperation	France, US, regional partners	Counter-terrorism, conflict resolution, military training	Security partnerships with France, military training programmes.

Diplomatic Strategy	Countries Involved	Purpose	Examples
Cultural and Educational Engagement	European countries, others	Strengthening ties through cultural and educational initiatives	Student exchange programmes, cultural diplomacy with European countries.

Table 3 above clearly provides an overview of the diplomatic strategies used by ECCAS countries, but also their objectives in engaging with external powers.ECCAS member countries have direct representation within the European Commission; however, they maintain diplomatic missions in the US, China and Russia. Specifically, each country has an embassy in Washington, D.C., Beijing and Moscow, reflecting a uniform diplomatic presence across these major global powers. The absence of direct EU representation for ECCAS member states highlights a lack of dedicated diplomatic presence within the European Commission, which may limit direct influence and engagement with EU policies and decision-making processes.

ECCAS countries and their objectives in engaging with external powers

Their economic diplomacy focuses on trade and investment to diversify economic dependencies and foster growth, while security and military cooperation with powers like France and the US address regional security threats and enhance defence capabilities. Additionally, cultural and educational diplomacy strengthens global ties through exchanges and mutual understanding. This comprehensive strategy not only aims to advance national interests but also to bolster regional cohesion and influence in the international arena, illustrating the nuanced and adaptive nature of their foreign policy. On 23 June 2015, ECCAS, together with CEMAC, signed the eleventh EDF Central African Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) with the EU in Brussels. This agreement allocated €327 million to endorse regional undertakings in three primary sectors: Political integration and collaboration in peace and security: €43 million;

economic integration and commerce, encompassing infrastructure advancement and backing for the EPA: € 211 million and sustainable stewardship of natural resources and biodiversity: € 88 million (EU 2024).

ECCAS is also engaged with the UN's Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to formulate the Master Plan for Industrialisation and Economic Diversification in Central Africa (PDIDE-AC), during the sixth COPIL/CER-AC Council of Ministers Meeting held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 6 -7 June 2024. This blueprint prioritises the creation of Advanced Special Economic Zones (NGSEZs) to enhance local value generation in industries including forestry, mineral extraction, agriculture-based manufacturing, as well as petroleum and natural gas. The endeavour seeks to transform the economies of the region by advancing industrial development and increasing trade within the region.

The eleven ECCAS member countries also have diplomatic representations in major external powers such as the US, China, and Russia; they underscore a strategic focus on maintaining direct diplomatic channels with these countries. This presence reflects a broader geopolitical strategy where ECCAS countries seek to establish and reinforce bilateral relations with key global powers. It suggests that these countries prioritise relationships with major international actors to enhance their geopolitical and economic interests, likely seeking support and partnerships beyond the EU framework. In contrast, smaller or less economically stable countries, such as São Tomé and Príncipe, may lack the means to establish and sustain embassies in all great powers' capitals. Instead, they often depend on non-resident diplomats or authorise their missions from embassies situated in adjacent countries.

However, as is the case for many countries inside and outside Africa, some ECCAS members that have their ambassadors in Belgium are also accredited to represent their country to the EU. This dual role is strategic and efficient, allowing the country to handle relations with Belgium and the EU from a single diplomatic base in Brussels. The Diplomatic List by the European External Action Service as of 2 May 2025, shows multiple ECCAS countries with ambassadors accredited to both Belgium and the EU: Cameroon's Ambassador Daniel Evina Abe'e serves both; Chad's

Brussels embassy covers Belgium, Luxembourg and the EU; the Republic of the Congo's Ambassador Léon Raphaël Mokoko is accredited to Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the EU; Gabon's Ambassador Serge Thierry Mickoto Chavagne is accredited to Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the EU; Equatorial Guinea's embassy in Brussels is responsible for Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the EU.

This helps manage the country's diplomatic relations effectively, due to limited resources. Instead, countries like São Tomé and Príncipe may use embassies in nearby nations for representation, maintaining EU relations without opening a new mission. This strategy is similar to regional groups like the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), which share a diplomatic mission in Brussels for both Belgium and the EU. This centralised approach implies that these countries interact with the EU primarily through EU delegations in their countries rather than through specific missions within the EU's institutions.

However, the diplomatic interactions between ECCAS members and world powers are influenced by a complex mix of historical connections, economic incentives, security partnerships and strategic aims. For instance, France's colonial past in Central Africa has resulted in lasting political and military bases and defence agreements in countries like Gabon and Chad. These relationships have also sparked tensions, with growing opposition to perceived neocolonial influence prompting calls to reassess these partnerships.

China engages with ECCAS members primarily to secure access to natural resources and boost trade. For instance, in the 2000s, China funded oil projects in Chad, gaining influence after the World Bank halted loans over governance issues, showing how economic motives shape diplomatic ties.

Russia has increased its influence in the region, particularly through security aid to the CAR via private military contractors (the Wagner Group). This situation raises concerns about the neutrality of ECCAS mediation efforts, highlighted when CAR's President was appointed ECCAS mediator during Gabon's 2023 coup, evoking apprehension over potential Russian bias.

The US also works with ECCAS nations to foster regional stability

and counter security threats. In the Gulf of Guinea, it supports maritime security initiatives and cooperation with ECOWAS to combat piracy and improve ocean governance, reflecting its strategic interest in safeguarding crucial shipping routes and encouraging regional collaboration.

These examples demonstrate the intricate nature of ECCAS's ties with global powers, where historical legacies, economic goals, security requirements and strategic purposes intersect, leading to complex and sometimes contentious relations.

ECCAS economic, trade and investment environments

ECCAS maintains a delicate balance between bilateral and multilateral relations with global powers to maximise economic benefits while promoting international trade, diversification and investment. Indeed, ECCAS and its members do not show a clear preference for either multilateral or bilateral relationships. They strategically use both, leveraging multilateral frameworks, pursuing bilateral partnerships to address specific national priorities and attract targeted investments.

For instance, ECCAS has shown a commitment to regional integration through several collective initiatives, including the establishment of a free trade area and a customs union, as outlined in Article 6 of the ECCAS Treaty. Although progress has been gradual, with only about 34 per cent of intra-ECCAS tariffs reduced to zero, these steps signify a dedication to multilateral economic cooperation. While progress has been slow and only about 34 per cent of intra-ECCAS tariffs have been eliminated, these efforts reflect a dedication to economic collaboration among multiple nations.

ECCAS economic environment

The Central African region appears to be the continent's most natural-resource-dependent subregion that registered an estimated output growth of 3.9 per cent in 2023, from a contraction of 5 per cent in 2022 (Afreximbank 2024). ECA (2016) assesses the effectiveness of regional integration schemes in Central Africa, stating that only four of ECCAS's

eleven members have ratified the Free Movement Protocol and have a monetary union. Although these initiatives are embedded within ECCAS's regional framework, they align with the AU's overarching objectives of continental integration. The AU's Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons, adopted in 2018, aims to promote free movement of people across all member nations. Nevertheless, advancement has been slow, with two of four ECCAS members (Rwanda and São Tomé and Príncipe) having ratified the protocol thus far, and has been signed by 33 member states. The region achieved a real GDP growth of 5.0 per cent in 2022, and 4.9 per cent in 2023, up from 3.8 per cent in 2021 (African Development Bank 2019b, 2023) (see Figure 5.2). This economic regain was fuelled by favourable commodity prices in a region with net exporters of not only crude oil, but also minerals and other commodities.

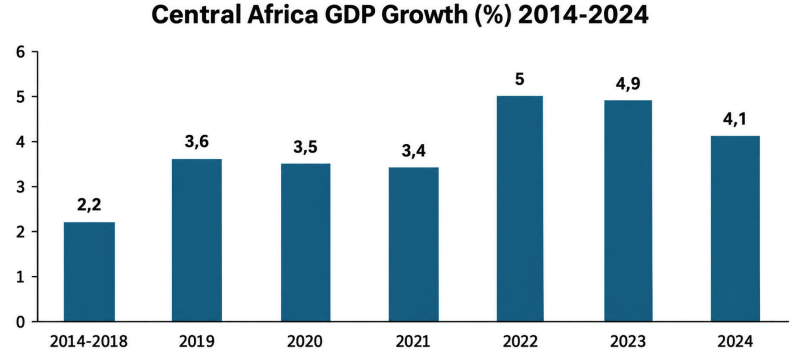


Figure 5.2: Central Africa GDP growth (%) 2014-2024. Source: Adapted from Afreximbank (2023); African Development Bank (2019b, 2023).

Figure 1 shows that the region experienced and interesting performance in 2022 and 2023. This growth was boosted by high export prices in the region with net exporters of crude oil, minerals and other commodities. This reflects the region's good economic performance compared to the African average of 3.8 er cent. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, ECCAS faced significant economic difficulties, marked by a substantial economic decline, with the average growth rate dropping to

-2.6 per cent in 2020 from 2.8 per cent in 2019. Nations with economies heavily dependent on oil exports, such as the Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon, were among the most severely impacted, with growth contractions of -6.8 per cent, -6.1 per cent, and -2.7 per cent, respectively (The European Business Council for Africa 2021).

ECCAS member states collaborated with various international partners to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic. China contributed in medical supplies and vaccines to several Central African countries, including Cameroon, which received 200 000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine. The EU contributed € 54 million to the CAR to support public expenditures affected by the pandemic (European Commission 2020).

The US, mainly via USAID, have also offered significant aid to ECCAS member countries to alleviate the health and socio-economic consequences of the crisis: close to US$ 8 million was given to Cameroon for health and humanitarian aid, together with 303 050 Johnson & Johnson vaccine doses in July 2021; The CAR received over US$ 10 million focussed on risk communication, infection prevention in medical facilities and access to clean water, assisting vulnerable groups like refugees and those displaced; the DRC received approximately US$ 26 million, including 50 ventilators to enhance healthcare; the Republic of the Congo, about US$ 250 000 for response coordination, risk communication and healthcare worker training in infection protocols; and Chad more than US$ 3.5 million aimed at infection control, public awareness and hygiene promotion. Globally, by joining the COVAX initiative with US$ 4 billion, the US became its largest donor (USAID 2021).

It is important to note that the region's good economic performance in 2022 and 2023 varied from one country to another, and is expected to moderate from 4.1 per cent in 2024 to 4.7 per cent in 2025 (African Development Bank 2023).

Table 5.4: Real GDP growth rates for ECCAS member states from 2020 to 2023. Source: Author's own, build from African Development Bank (2019, 2023); The European Business Council for Africa (2021).

Country	2020 Growth (%)	2021 Growth (%)	2022 Growth (%)	2023 Growth (%)
Cameroon	-2.4	3.5	3.6	3.3
CAR	1.0	1.0	0.5	0.7
Chad	-2.1	-0.9	3.6	4.9
Republic of the Congo	-6.3	1.1	1.8	2.0
DRC	1.7	6.2	6.6	6.3
Equatorial Guinea	-4.8	-0.4	3.2	–5.9
Gabon	-1.8	1.5	3.0	2.3
São Tomé and Príncipe	-6.5	1.0	2.5	3.0
Burundi	0.3	3.1	1.8	3.3
Rwanda	-3.4	10.9	8.2	6.2
Angola	-5.4	0.7	3.0	2.8

Table 5.4 shows that, during the pandemic years, the CAR saw limited economic growth, with GDP rising by 0.5 per cent in 2022 and slightly more to 1.0 per cent in 2023, mainly due to improvements in agriculture, which grew from 0.3 per cent in 2022 to 1.2 per cent in 2023. Chad encountered economic declines in 2020 and 2021, however bounced back in the following years, recording growth of 2.8 per cent in 2022 and 4.12 per cent in 2023, driven by a recovery in the oil industry. The DRC maintained steady and strong growth, with GDP increasing by 1.74 per cent in 2020, 6.2 per cent in 2021, 8.92 per cent in 2022, and 8.56 per cent in 2023, largely fuelled by the mining sector's robust performance. Equatorial Guinea's economy contracted by 4.8 per cent in 2020 and dipped slightly by 0.4 per cent in 2021. The economy grew by 3.7 per cent in 2022, however, faced a significant decline of 5.7 per cent in 2023 due to a substantial drop in oil output and exports. Burundi's GDP growth showed gradual improvement, starting at 0.33 per cent in 2020 and increasing to

3.1 per cent in 2021, slightly decreasing to 1.85 per cent in 2022, then rising to 2.7 per cent in 2023. These data illustrate the diverse economic paths taken by ECCAS member states in response to the pandemic and their recovery efforts.

In 2024, the economic projections for Chad and the DRC have been significantly shaped by environmental and security elements, highlighting the necessity of incorporating these aspects into economic planning. ECCAS has, however, navigated its bilateral and multilateral relationships with external powers by leveraging its economic goals and strategic partnerships. ECCAS emphasises a balance between strengthening ties with individual countries and engaging in multilateral platforms. Through multilateral efforts, ECCAS works with UNECA to build regional value chains in industries like timber, mining, agro-industry and oil-gas, in line with the Douala Consensus for economic diversification (ECA 2024). Also, ECCAS and ECOWAS have, since 2018, collaboratively tackled security issues such as improving maritime safety in the Gulf of Guinea. On a bilateral front, ECCAS has supported public-private collaborations, exemplified by the creation of a Regional Parent Stock Farm in Cameroon to boost livestock production, though, countries like Cameroon have bilaterally signed the Economic Partnership Agreements with the EU to strengthen trade connections.

These external relations have affected ECCAS' economic performance. For instance, the geopolitical tensions, particularly the Ukraine-Russia conflict, the consequences of the earthquake that occurred in Turkey in February 2023, and the economic situation in China and the EU constrain regional economic growth, thus causing blockages in global supply chains and commodity price changes.

Key trends in trade partnerships

Trade relations between ECCAS member states and global powers have evolved significantly over the past two decades, driven by changes in global demand, trade policies and regional development strategies. Although the legal instrument of the ECCAS Free Trade Area (FTA)

were signed in 2004, the FTA is not yet in force, only three member states (Cameroon, Congo and Gabon) have adopted ECCAS preferential tariff for intra-ECCAS trade. The remaining eight countries including Angola, Burundi, the CAR, Chad, the DRC, Equatorial Guinea, São Tomé and Príncipe and Zambia, have not adopted the preferential tariff. Several reasons explain this:

- **Institutional Obstacles:** Many nations lack the necessary frameworks to enact and oversee the preferential tariff properly. As of 2018, only four ECCAS countries had set up national committees to review applications for approval of locally made goods under the preferential tariff system.

- **Economic and Structural Difficulties:** Some countries face economic issues, like limited industrial capacity and poor infrastructure, preventing them from fulfilling the preferential tariff's requirements.

- **Political and Administrative Hurdles:** Problems such as political unrest, governance issues and administrative inefficiencies can slow down the adoption and execution of regional trade agreements. This can be due to the fact that the region's export structure remains dominated by a limited number of products such as crude oil, copper, and natural gas, while showing growing engagement with emerging economies, especially China and India. This period marked a significant shift in global trade alignments for the region, with China becoming its largest trading partner by 2024, as ECCAS exported in 2023, ECCAS exported a total of US$ 111 billion, with China being the largest export destination with US$ 42.5 billion. Other key trading partners were the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which took in US$ 11.3 billion worth, India at US$ 8.05 billion, the Netherlands at US$ 5.42 billion and Spain at US$ 4.9 billion.

  The structure of ECCAS trade is characterised by dependence on commodity exports, a low level of regional integration, and underdeveloped regional value chains. Between 2016 and 2023,

intra-regional trade accounted for 2.7 per cent of Central Africa's total trade, reflecting a limited level of integration. ECCAS foreign trade is more oriented towards other continents (other than Africa), accounting for 86.1 per cent of its total trade over the period 2016-2023, this accounts for other infrastructures such as road, railway, aviation and seaport infrastructure. Non-tariff barriers like complex customs processes, inconsistent regulations and bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of coordination among different agencies further limit regional trade, raising transaction costs and discouraging cross-border business.

Armed conflicts and instability in countries like the CAR, where ongoing civil unrest since 2013 has wrecked infrastructure, weakened the private sector and driven nearly 75 per cent of the populace into poverty; and in DRC where the M23 group dominate Eastern Congo has caused economic issues like cash shortages and disrupted supply lines due to imposed taxes on local enterprises and minerals. These conflicts obstruct trade and stymie efforts for stability and conflict prevention in the region.

- **ECCAS Regional trade dynamics:** Between 2018 and 2023, the total trade volume between the ECCAS and key external powers such as China, India, the UAE, the Netherlands and France amounted to approximately US$ 250 billion. In 2022 alone, ECCAS exported goods worth US$ 48.5 billion to China, US$ 10.2 billion to India, US$ 9.9 billion to the UAE, US$ 5.97 billion to the Netherlands and US$ 5.89 billion to France (OEC 2022). These figures highlight the significant trade relationships ECCAS maintains with these external powers, with China becoming the largest partner. On average, the annual trade volume growth is approximately 5.7 per cent, with notable jumps in the early and latter parts of the decade. Exports increased by almost 50 per cent in 2023, and recovery continued into 2024, with the ECCAS region recording US$ 123 billion exports, contributing almost 20 per cent growth and US$ 89 billion imports in 2023 (Afreximbank 2024).

- ECCAS's most exported products in 2022 were petroleum oils from bituminous minerals (US$ 63.3 billion), copper cathodes (US$ 19.2 billion), natural gas, liquefied (US$ 10.5 billion), cobalt, unwrought, matte, waste or scrap, powder (US$ 5.83 billion), and gold in unwrought forms (US$ 3.86 billion). The same year, the top internal exports of ECCAS were refined petroleum (US$ 207 million), other ships (US$ 98.3 million), engines (US$ 75.2 million), cement (US$ 68.1 million), and rice (US$ 65.6 million), and the principal destinations of internal exports were DRC (US$ 652 million), CAR (US$ 284 million), Congo Republic (US$ 219 million), Rwanda (US$ 98.3 million), and Burundi (US$ 90.6 million). Globally, the region's trade is dominated by Angola and the DRC, which account for over half of the region's exports and imports in 2022.

Intra-ECCAS trade

Over the past decade, intra-ECCAS trade has experienced a gradual upward trend, reflecting an increase in regional economic integration. However, Central Africa's share in world trade and the volume of intra-community trade remain low. The region's share in world exports remains low compared to other regions of the continent. On average, its exports accounted for 12.3 per cent of global exports in 2018–2023 compared to 16.3 per cent for West Africa and 23.8 per cent for Southern Africa (Afreximbank 2023, 2024; African Development Bank Group 2019a, 2019b, 2023; OEC 2022; UNCTAD 2023). Within this same period, ECCAS nations only captured 9.35 per cent of the region's exports, well below the 41,5 per cent and nearly 12.4 per cent, respectively, for China and the EU (Afreximbank 2023, 2024; African Development Bank Group 2019a, 2019b, 2023; OEC 2022; UNCTAD 2023). Intra-regional trade, thus, remains a relatively small portion of ECCAS's total exports. In 2023, the value of intra-regional trade within ECCAS was approximately US$ 12.7 billion (CEEAC-ECCAS 2023b). This figure represents about 6.6 per cent of the total trade within Africa (Pan-African Chamber of

Commerce and Industry 2023). The relatively low per centage highlights the ongoing challenges in achieving higher levels of regional integration and trade within the ECCAS region. This is reflective of longstanding structural challenges, including infrastructure deficits, non-tariff barriers and political instability in some member states. Despite some regional efforts to enhance economic integration, intra-ECCAS trade remains underdeveloped compared to other regional economic communities on the continent.

Extra-regional trade

There has been a shifting trade partnership for ECCAS in recent years as emerging Asian economies have become significant sources of demand and supply. In 2022, ECCAS exported a total of US$ 129 billion. During the last five reported years, the exports of ECCAS have changed by US$ 44.8 billion from US$ 84.3 billion in 2017 to US$ 129 billion in 2022 (OEC 2022).

Key trading partners

In 2022, the top external exports of ECCAS were China (US$ 48.5 billion), India (US$ 10.2 billion), the UAE (US$ 9.96 billion), the Netherlands (US$ 5.97 billion), and France (US$ 5.89 billion) (OEC 2022). Prior to this period (between 2000 and 2020) and reflected in Figure 5.2, the main trading partners of ECCAS in terms of imports were the EU (613.9 per cent) of ECCAS GDP, followed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (3.5 per cent), China (2.8 per cent) and ECCAS (0.1 per cent) (Nguetse Tegoum et al. 2024). ECCAS's latter position is essentially due to the limited diversification of the region's export products and the similarity of national production structures.

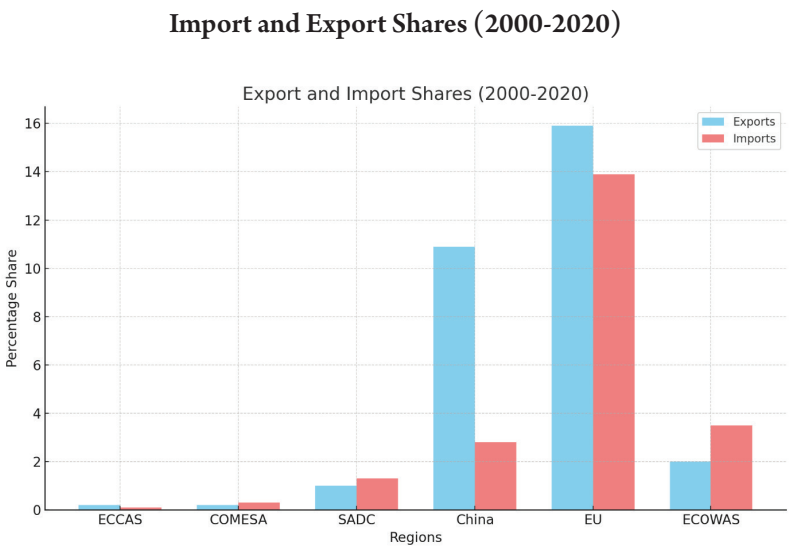


Figure 5.3: ECCAS's main trading partners' average share of exports and imports (2000–2020). Source: Adapted from Nguetse Tegoum et al. (2024); UNCTAD (2023).

Another parameter of ECCAS trade lies in the products exchanged. The main products exported from ECCAS to the rest of the world between 2018 and 2023 are mineral fuels, lubricants, and related materials (oil, natural gas, etcetera), which account for more than 60 per cent of the ECCAS exports (ECA 2024, World Bank 2023, UNCTAD 2023 data). Indeed, the oil export rate is very high in the ECCAS zone.

Since 2021, China appears to be the prominent partner of ECCAS and its member states, which have engaged extensively through bilateral and multilateral agreements (see table 5.3), particularly under the BRI. These agreements focus on infrastructure development, trade and resource extraction. In 2022, for example, China's bilateral trade with ECCAS countries amounted to over US$ 50 billion, making it one of the region's largest trading partners (Afreximbank 2023).

Key sectors of trade

Oil and Gas: Angola, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon are major oil exporters. In 2022, these countries accounted for over 80 per cent of ECCAS's total oil exports, with China, the EU and the US as primary importers (ECCAS Secretariat 2020).

Mining: The DRC is a key player in global cobalt and copper markets, with significant exports to China and the EU. In 2022, the DRC's mining exports contributed 25 per cent to its GDP, valued at US$ 6.5 billion (World Bank 2023).

Agriculture and Forestry: Cameroon and Gabon are significant exporters of timber, coffee, cocoa and palm oil. In 2022, these sectors contributed 15 per cent of ECCAS's total exports, with the EU being the main trading partner (UNCTAD 2023).

Table 5.5: Balancing bilateral and multilateral relations of ECCAS with global powers. Source: International Monetary Fund (2023).

Type of Relation	Global Power	Trade Volume (USD/EUR Billion)	Key Focus Areas	Challenges
Bilateral	China	US$ 12 billion	Infrastructure, Mining, Energy	Debt sustainability, Dependency on Chinese imports
Bilateral	France	EUR 4.6 billion	Oil, Gas, Consumer Goods	Over-reliance on French companies in certain sectors
Bilateral	US	US$ 3.1 billion	Oil, Minerals, Agricultural Products	Limited trade diversification
Multilateral	EU	EUR 8.4 billion	Machinery, Pharmaceuticals, Agriculture	Trade imbalances, Non-tariff barriers
Multilateral	AU	N/A	Intra-African Trade, Regional Integration	Implementation challenges, Policy harmonisation

Though China has become the dominant trading partner in ECCAS, the EU remains a significant player, and the US maintains steady trade relations, focusing on specific sectors like oil and minerals (Afreximbank 2023).

Table 5.6: Key sectors of trade in ECCAS (2022). Source: Adapted from Afreximbank (2023); World Bank (2023); UNCTAD (2023).

Sector	Main Exporting Countries	Key Export Markets	Export Volume/Value (2022)	Per centage of ECCAS Total Exports
Oil and Gas	Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon	China, EU, US	1.2 million GDP/ USD 14.2 billion	40%
Mining	DRC	China, EU	300 000 tons of cobalt / US$ 6.5 billion	18%
Agriculture	Cameroon, Gabon, Chad	EU, US, China	US$ 2.3 billion	7%
Forestry	Gabon, Cameroon	EU, China	4 million cubic meters / US$ 1.8 billion	5%

The line chart illustrates the growth of trade relations between ECCAS and global powers from 2000 to 2022, highlighting the dominance of China, the EU and the US.

Table 5.7: Key trade agreements between ECCAS and global powers. Source: Adapted from Afreximbank (2023); UNCTAD (2023); World Bank (2023).

Global Power	Agreement Type	Date Signed	Key Provisions	Member States Involved
China	Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs), BRI Agreements	2013-2022	Infrastructure development, loans, trade facilitation	Angola, Cameroon, DRC, Gabon
France	ECA	Ongoing	Trade in goods, financial aid, security cooperation	Gabon, Cameroon, Chad
US	AGOA	2000-present	Duty-free access to the US market for eligible African products	All ECCAS member states
EU	EPAs	2008-present	Trade liberalisation, development cooperation	All ECCAS member states
Russia	Military and Economic Cooperation Agreements	2015-2022	Arms sales, political alliances, economic aid	CAR, Angola, Sudan

Some of these trade policies and agreements appear beneficial, and others are disadvantageous, as shown in Table 7. The AGOA has provided ECCAS countries with preferential access to the US market, boosting exports in sectors such as textiles, cocoa and minerals. In 2022, ECCAS exports under AGOA were valued at US$ 1.5 billion, a 10 per cent increase from the previous year (US Department of Commerce 2022). The EPAs with the EU have also enhanced market access for ECCAS products, particularly in agriculture and light manufacturing. However,

the impact is limited by non-tariff barriers and stringent quality standards (UNCTAD 2023)

On the contrary, the Chinese Loan Agreements under the BRI have raised concerns about debt sustainability. Angola, for instance, owes over US$ 22 billion to China, representing 60 per cent of its external debt, primarily due to loans for infrastructure projects (Brautigam et al.2020).

Table 5.8: Impact of key trade policies and agreements on ECCAS (2020). Source: Adapted from Brautigam et al. (2020); UNCTAD (2023).

Agreement	Economic Impact (USD Billion)	Positive Outcomes	Negative Outcomes	Affected Countries
AGOA (US)	1.5	Increased export volumes, diversification of markets	Limited to specific products, sunset clauses	All ECCAS member states
EPAs (EU)	8.4	Enhanced market access, capacity building	Trade imbalances, non-tariff barriers	All ECCAS member states
BRI Agreements (China)	12.0	Infrastructure development, job creation	Debt sustainability concerns, resource dependency	Angola, Cameroon, DRC, Gabon

Table 8 brings out the asymmetric impacts of these trade agreements on ECCAS member states. AGOA and EPAs have provided market access and capacity building, however, gains are sometimes limited by product coverage and implementation challenges. BRI has brought significant volumes of infrastructure investments, however, also raises debt and dependence risks. A strategic approach that balances opportunities as well as risks is required for ECCAS nations to gain maximum benefits from these agreements.

Opportunities and risks for local businesses in partnering with foreign entities

Opportunities

Access to New Markets: Partnerships with foreign entities open new markets for local businesses, especially in sectors like agriculture, manufacturing, and services.

Technology Transfer: Collaborations with multinational corporations bring new technologies and expertise to ECCAS, enhancing productivity and competitiveness.

Enhanced Infrastructure: Foreign investments in infrastructure reduce production and transportation costs, benefiting local businesses.

Risks

Competition from Multinationals: Local businesses face competition from well-funded foreign companies, especially in sectors like retail, manufacturing, and construction.

Market Access Barriers: Non-tariff barriers, such as stringent quality standards and complex customs procedures, limit access to foreign markets.

Regulatory Constraints: Inconsistent regulations across ECCAS countries can hinder businesses seeking to expand regionally.

Table 5.9: Analysis of partnership between local businesses and foreign entities. Source: Author's analysis.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Access to international markets through trade agreements (for example, AGOA, EPAs)	High dependency on commodity exports (for example, oil, minerals)
Significant foreign investment in infrastructure and energy sectors	Debt sustainability concerns due to high levels of borrowing
Potential for technology transfer and skills development	Vulnerability to external economic shocks
Opportunities	**Threats**
Expansion of intra-African trade under AfCFTA	Increased competition from multinational corporations
Development of new sectors (for example, manufacturing)	Geopolitical tensions affecting trade and investment flows
Leveraging strategic partnerships for climate resilience	Trade disputes and protectionist policies by global powers

Sources of funding for ECCAS operations

ECCAS finances its operations through a combination of member-state contributions, multilateral assistance, bilateral partnerships, and project-specific funding mechanisms. External partners continue to play a significant role in supporting regional integration initiatives, institutional reforms, infrastructure development, peacebuilding programmes, and environmental projects.

The European Union remains one of the organisation's most important development partners, while the African Development Bank has contributed substantially to institutional strengthening and regional infrastructure projects. China, France, the United States, and other partners also support strategic initiatives across sectors including transport, energy, security, health, and agriculture (European Union 2024).

Although external financing has enabled important developmental gains, reliance on external resources raises questions regarding financial sustainability and strategic autonomy. Strengthening domestic resource mobilisation and expanding regional financing mechanisms therefore remain essential priorities for the long-term effectiveness of ECCAS' Vision 2025 (CEEAC-ECCAS 2023a). This includes funding for infrastructure, security and economic development projects, for example, the African Development Bank pledged € 250 million out of the total € 403 million for the construction of the Brazzaville–Kinshasa Bridge between the Republic of the Congo and the DRC; or the Djermaya Solar Power Station (Chad) funded by the African Development Bank, the EU-Africa Infrastructure Fund and Proparco, with approximately € 60.3 million; and the EU's € 91 million funding to Cameroon over three years to enhance infrastructure, including energy, roads, and a railway linking Cameroon with Chad (CEEAC-ECCAS 2023b).

Key external investors

External investors are increasingly active in Central Africa, reflecting the region's strategic importance in contemporary global economic and geopolitical dynamics. Driven by abundant natural resources, expanding consumer markets, and emerging infrastructure needs, major international actors have expanded their investment footprints across ECCAS member states. Understanding the motivations, patterns, and implications of these investments is essential to assessing the opportunities and constraints they create for regional development, economic diversification, and African agency. This section, therefore, analyses the main external investors in the ECCAS region and evaluates their contribution to the Community's broader development objectives.

- **China**: Major investments in infrastructure and mining.
- **EU**: Focus on development aid, governance and infrastructure.
- **US**: Investments in energy, particularly oil and gas and humanitarian aid.
- **France**:Investments in various sectors, including energy and infrastructure, security, climate change and health.

- **Russia**: Investments focus mainly on peace and security technology and infrastructure.
- **Other Emerging Economies**: Brazil, India and Turkey are increasingly investing in agriculture and infrastructure.

Table 5.10: Sources of funding for ECCAS operations (2022–2023). Source: CEEAC-ECCAS (2023b); EU Special Report (2023); OEC (2022); OECD (2023); World Bank (2023).

Global Power	Funding Type	Total Funding (US$/EUR Million)	Primary Use
EU	Development Aid (EDF)	EUR 117 billion	Governance, security sector reforms, infrastructure
UAE	Development Assistance	US$ 5.97 billion	governance, health
China	Concessional Loans, Grants	US$ 48.5 billion	Infrastructure, digital economy
US	Humanitarian Aid, Security Assistance	US$ 1.9 billion	Health, education, counterterrorism
Russia	Security Assistance	US$ 1.4 billion	Arms sales, military training

Despite its unique potential, the Central African region receives fewer sustainable investments than other regions, though these external investments are crucial for the region's development, as they focus on infrastructure, energy, mining, and agriculture.

Foreign direct investment flows

The distribution of foreign investment across the ECCAS region reflects both sectoral priorities and the diversity of international partners

engaged in Central Africa. The following points summarise the main sectors attracting external investment and identify the principal foreign partners contributing to the region's economic development. Together, they provide insight into the patterns, sources, and strategic orientation of external investment flows within the ECCAS area.

Conditions attached

Economic Reforms: Aid and investments often require economic policy reforms, such as trade liberalisation and fiscal austerity.

Good Governance: EU and US aid typically includes conditions for improving governance, anti-corruption measures and democratic reforms.

Debt Repayment: Chinese investments under the BRI often require collateral in the form of investment in infrastructure (roads, railways, ports and airports); Energy and Electricity (oil, gas and renewable energy projects); Mining (extraction of minerals and metals); *and a*griculture through the development of agribusiness and food security projects.

Figure 5.4: Three charts representing sectors, partners and destination of foreign direct investments in ECCAS (2022). Source: **Adapted Africa's Development Dynamics (2023); Central Africa Economic Outlook (2023).**

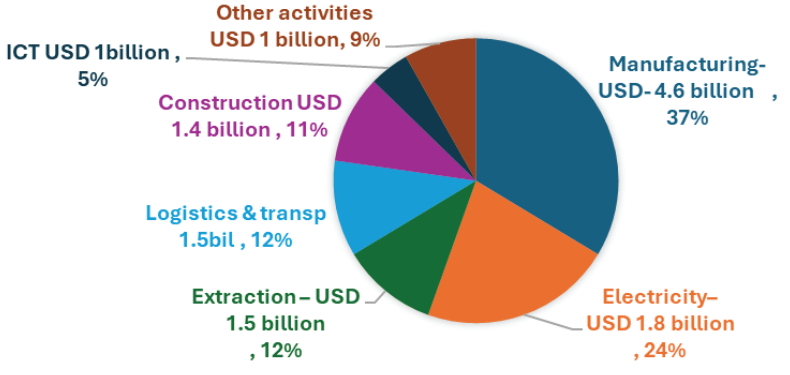


Figure 5.4(a): Sector

Figure 5.4(b): Source/partner

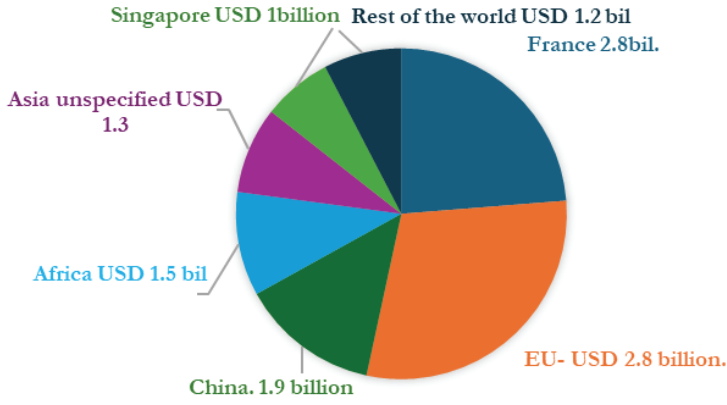
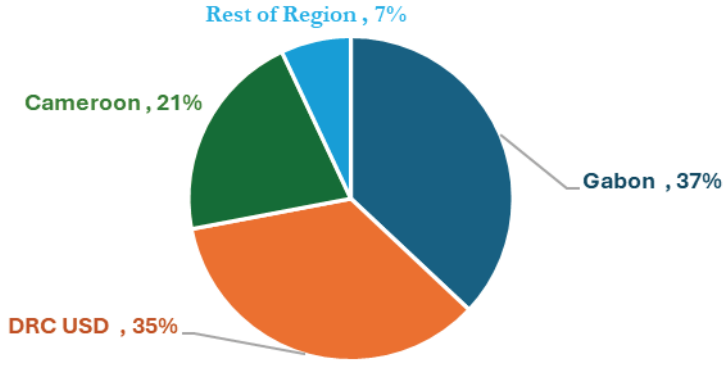


Figure 5.4(c): Destination



The chart highlights the growing diversification of FDI in ECCAS, moving beyond extractive industries to sectors critical for sustainable development, such as manufacturing, which attracted the largest share of FDI (34 per cent), mostly funded by France (US$ 2.8 billion), and Gabon was the main destination with (37 per cent). This suggests efforts to diversify economies in the region, with electricity representing 22 per cent, extraction and logistics (11 per cent) and ICT (4 per cent). Others

only account for 8 per cent, although historically dominant, investment in the extraction sector (such as mining and oil) has decreased, showing a 67 per cent decline in new projects, which is part of the ongoing reorientation away from over-reliance on raw materials.

Table 5.11: Investments and development aid received by ECCAS countries (2023). Source: Adapted from European Commission (2020); UNCTAD (2023); USAID (2023).

Source	Type of Aid/ Investment	Value (US$/EUR Million)	Conditions	Impact on ECCAS
China	Infrastructure Loans, FDI	US$ 10 billion (past decade)	Debt repayment with natural resources, no governance conditions	Improved infrastructure, increased debt burden
EU	Development Aid (EDF), FDI	US$ 5.2 billion	Governance reforms, human rights, climate action	Enhanced governance, mixed economic outcomes
India	Development Aid	US$ 2 billion	Green energy; health	-
US	Humanitarian Aid, Security Assistance Infrastructure Investment	US$ 500 million	Governance improvements, security sector reforms	Strengthened security, improved governance in recipient countries enhanced infrastructure (for example, Lobito Corridor (Angola-DRC)
World Bank and IMF	Economic reforms, infrastructure, social programmes	US$ 5 billion	Governance reforms, human rights, climate action	Enhanced governance, mixed economic outcomes

In 2023, the ECCAS region experienced substantial FDI inflows, with the EU leading at US$ 5.2 billion, followed closely by China at US$ 4.8 billion. India's investments reached US$ 2.0 billion, while Russia and Brazil contributed US$ 1.4 billion and US$ 0.8 billion, respectively.

From 2018-2023, the ECCAS region saw significant FDI inflows from several key global actors. Table 12 a breakdown based on available data.

Table 5.12: Direct investments from key external actors in ECCAS (2018-2023). Source: Future Africa (2024); OEC (2022); UNCTAD (2023).

Year	China (US$ Billion)	EU (US$ Billion)	India (US$ Billion)	Russia (US$ Billion)	Brazil (US$ Billion)	Key Sectors
2018	3.1	4.8	1.2	0.9	0.4	Infrastructure, Mining, Energy
2019	3.3	4.5	1.4	1.0	0.5	Oil and Gas, Telecommunications
2020	3.6	3.7	1.6	1.1	0.3	Renewable Energy, Transport
2021	4.5	5.1	1.9	1.3	0.6	Manufacturing, Construction
2022	4.0	4.9	1.7	1.2	0.7	Agribusiness, IT and Digital Infrastructure
2023	4.8	5.2	2.0	1.4	0.8	Green Energy, Healthcare

Table 5.12 reflects key trends in foreign investments, with sectors like energy, infrastructure and digital transformation receiving the most focus from external actors. China has been a significant investor, particularly in infrastructure, energy and construction sectors. Between 2018 and 2023, China's FDI increased steadily, reaching US$ 4.8 billion in 2023.

While the EU Investments remain one of the top contributions to FDI in ECCAS, focusing on sectors like renewable energy, manufacturing and digital infrastructure. India has increased its investments, with a notable focus on telecommunications and energy, reaching US$ 2.0 billion in 2023. Russia and Brazil have smaller, however, growing investments, with Russia primarily focusing on oil and gas and Brazil contributing to agribusiness and green energy sectors.

ECCAS cooperation on peace and security

There is growing competition and multilateral support in Central Africa, which appears to be one of the main recipients of external powers' presence. ECCAS has become one of the focal points for external competition. The CAR has become a focal point for external competition. Russian military support to the region (CAR) contrasts with the UN's peacekeeping efforts and the EU's development programmes. France has had military bases or a presence in the region since 1960, the US since 2003, and China since 2017. New actors have also emerged, with Turkey, Israel and Saudi Arabia all establishing a presence over the last ten years. ECCAS member states have established various security and military partnerships with global powers, which significantly influence regional stability and security dynamics. For instance, Israel and the US have boosted their security and intelligence cooperation across Africa, offering military training and equipment to bolster Central African security forces such as the Rapid Intervention Battalion in Cameroon, established in 2001 to combat armed groups and border security threats. Regionally, ECCAS has implemented measures to tackle security issues. The Multinational Force of Central Africa consists of military units from ECCAS member states and conducts peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. Moreover, the Yaoundé Code of Conduct was adopted on 25 June 2013 to fight piracy and illegal maritime activities in the Gulf of Guinea, leading to the establishment of centres like the Regional Centre for Maritime Security in Central Africa (CRESMAC) in 2014 in the Republic of the Congo, improving maritime security collaboration among

ECCAS members. These efforts reflect ECCAS's dedication to collective security and regional stability.

The following partnerships aim to enhance regional security, support counterterrorism efforts, and strengthen peacekeeping operations.

Key security and military partnerships

France

Military Presence and Operations: France maintains a substantial military presence in Central Africa through its bases in Chad (N'Djamena) and Gabon (Libreville). It conducts counterterrorism operations like Operation Barkhane, which targets jihadist groups in the Sahel and parts of Central Africa, including Chad and Northern Cameroon (Tull 2019).

Military Assistance and Training: France provides military training and logistical support to ECCAS member states. In 2022, France trained over 3 000 Central African troops and security personnel in counterterrorism, intelligence and peacekeeping operations (French Ministry of Armed Forces 2022).

US

AFRICOM and Counterterrorism Support: The US, through the US Africa Command (AFRICOM), provides military assistance and capacity-building programmes to ECCAS countries. The US has deployed special forces in Cameroon to train local troops in counterterrorism operations against Boko Haram and ISIS-affiliated groups (US Department of Defence 2020).

Security Aid and Cooperation: The US has allocated over US$ 500 million in security aid to ECCAS countries between 2010 and 2022, focusing on training, intelligence sharing and equipment supply (US Department of State 2021).

Russia

Russia's influence in ECCAS has grown notably since 2017, particularly in the security sector. Russia has established military cooperation agreements with countries like CAR, where Russian military trainers have provided direct military support. Russian arms exports to ECCAS countries have also increased, with weapons deals amounting to over US$1 billion by 2023. This has positioned Russia as a key arms supplier in the region. Russia has thus expanded its military influence in Central Africa by signing security agreements with countries like CAR. Russia provides military training, arms sales, and deploys private military contractors, such as the Wagner Group, to support local forces (SIPRI 2023; UNSC 2022).

EU

Peacekeeping and Training Missions: The EU engages in peacekeeping and security capacity-building through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and has deployed military and civilian missions, such as the EU Training Mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM-RCA), to train CAR's armed forces (European Union External Action Service 2022).

Security and Governance Support: The EU allocated € 100 million for security sector reforms in CAR from 2015-2022, focusing on training, infrastructure development and improving governance within the security sector (European Commission 2015; 2022).

Table 5.13: Key security partnerships and military engagements in ECCAS. Source: Adapted from European Commission (2015); European Union (2022); SIPRI (2023); United Nations Security Council (2022).

Global Power	Type of Engagement	Key Activities	Primary Focus Countries	Estimated Support (US$/ EUR Million)
France	Military bases, training, counterterrorism	Operation Barkhane, training of 3 000 troops, logistical support	Chad, Cameroon, Gabon, CAR	EUR 250 million annually
US	AFRICOM, counterterrorism support	Military training, intelligence sharing, special forces deployment, security aid	Cameroon, Chad, DRC	US$ 500 million (2010–2022)
Russia	Military training, arms sales, private contractors	Security agreements, deployment of Wagner Group, arms sales to CAR	CAR, Sudan, Angola	US$ 150 million (2022)
EU	peacekeeping missions, security sector reforms	European Training Mission in the Central African Republic (EUTM-RCA) training mission, governance support, security infrastructure development	CAR, Chad, DRC	EUR 100 million (2015–2022)

Impact on regional stability and security dynamics:

- *Enhanced counterterrorism capabilities*: The involvement of France and the US in counterterrorism efforts has improved the capabilities of ECCAS member states to combat extrem-

ist groups. The deployment of French forces under Operation Barkhane and US support through AFRICOM has reduced terror attacks in the Lake Chad Basin by 20 per cent between 2020 and 2022 (African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism 2023).

- *Strengthened peacekeeping efforts*: The EU's EUTM-RCA mission has significantly enhanced the capacity of the CAR's armed forces, enabling them to maintain stability and support peace processes in conflict-affected regions. Since 2015, the EU mission has trained over 5 000 CAR military personnel, resulting in more effective peacekeeping operations (European Union External Action Service 2022).
- *Increased security sector reforms*: European and French support has been instrumental in advancing security sector reforms, promoting good governance, accountability and transparency within the security forces. Reforms in CAR have led to a 30 per cent reduction in human rights violations by state security forces between 2018 and 2022 (European Commission 2022).
- *Geopolitical tensions and rivalries*: The presence of multiple global powers, including France, the US and Russia, often pursuing divergent interests, has created a complex geopolitical environment. Russian military support in CAR, including the deployment of private military contractors, has led to tensions with France, the EU and the US, complicating international cooperation efforts in peacekeeping and security. In June 2021, France and the EU suspended military cooperation and € 10 million in budgetary aid to CAR, accusing its government of failing to respect political opposition and allowing a "massive" anti-French disinformation campaign, allegedly steered by Russia (France 24, 2022). The US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on companies in CAR linked to the Russian paramilitary group, accusing them of advancing Russia's destabilising agenda and undermining the nation's sovereignty through security and business operations.

China's increasing military involvement on the continent, includes utilising military training activities with African nations to boost China's expeditionary abilities and strategic goals (Nantulya 2024). An example of this is in 2018 when China held military trainings with CAR and Cameroon, involving troops and various military equipment. These actions illustrate China's broader plan to expand its presence in Africa.

- *Dependence on external security assistance*: ECCAS member states heavily rely on external military aid and training from global powers, which may undermine local ownership and the long-term sustainability of security operations. Dependency on foreign support for counterterrorism operations and peacekeeping limits the region's autonomy in addressing its security challenges (Tull 2019).

Key collaboration on counterterrorism and peacekeeping

ECCAS and its member states collaborate with global powers on counterterrorism and peacekeeping efforts to address regional security threats, including terrorism, insurgency and transnational crime.

US

Counterterrorism training and support: The US collaborates with ECCAS member states through AFRICOM, providing military training, intelligence sharing and logistical support for counterterrorism operations against Boko Haram, ISIS and other extremist groups. The US has trained over 2 000 security personnel in Cameroon and Chad in counterterrorism tactics since 2015 (US Department of Defence 2020). The US special forces conduct joint military exercises with ECCAS member states, enhancing regional cooperation and interoperability in counterterrorism efforts (US Department of State 2021).

France

Operation Barkhane: France's Operation Barkhane targets jihadist groups in the Sahel and Central Africa, involving Chad and Cameroon in coordinated military operations. This operation has significantly disrupted terrorist networks and reduced the frequency of attacks (Tull 2019). France also supports ECCAS peacekeeping missions by providing logistical, financial and training support, particularly in CAR (French Ministry of Armed Forces 2022).

EU

EU training missions: The EUTM-RCA trains CAR military forces in peacekeeping and counterinsurgency operations. The mission has enhanced the CAR's ability to maintain security and stability in conflict-affected areas (European Union External Action Service 2022).

Russia

Military advisers and contractors: Russia has steadily become the main security, economic and political partner of the CAR government since 2017. It provides military advisers and private military contractors (for example, the Wagner Group) to support ECCAS member states, particularly CAR. This engagement focusses on bolstering local security forces and supporting counterinsurgency operations (SIPRI 2023).

Table 5.14: Collaboration on counterterrorism and peacekeeping between ECCAS and global powers. Source: Adapted from Elowson and Wiklund (2011); International Crisis Group (2011).

Global Power	Type of Collaboration	Key Activities	Primary Countries Involved	Challenges
US	AFRICOM, counterterrorism support	Military training, intelligence sharing, joint exercises	Cameroon, Chad	Coordination with local forces, geopolitical sensitivities
France	Operation Barkhane, peacekeeping support	Counterterrorism operations, logistical support, training	Chad, Cameroon, CAR	Dependency on French military presence, operational challenges
EU	EU training missions, security sector reforms	Training, governance support, peacekeeping infrastructure	CAR, DRC	Limited resources, slow implementation of reforms
Russia	Military advisers, private contractors	Arms sales, military training, Wagner Group deployments	CAR	Geopolitical tensions, human rights concerns

Challenges on collaboration in counterterrorism and peacekeeping

Some of the challenges on collaboration in counterterrorism and peacekeeping are firstly, geopolitical tensions. Divergent interests of global powers in the region lead to conflicting approaches and policies, complicating coordination and collaboration. For example, the presence of Russian contractors in CAR has led to tensions with France, affecting peacekeeping efforts. Secondly, there are limited local capacity to collaborate with international partners on counterterrorism and peacekeeping. Despite external support, ECCAS member states often face limited capacity in terms of personnel, equipment and logistics,

hindering effective collaboration on counterterrorism and peacekeeping operations (Tull 2019). Finally, dependence on external support is a also a challenge for collaboration on counterterrorism and peacekeeping. ECCAS's reliance on foreign military aid and training can undermine local ownership of security operations, reducing the sustainability of peacekeeping efforts (African Union Commission 2022).

Human rights concerns

The use of private military contractors, such as the Wagner Group, has raised concerns about human rights violations, accountability and transparency in security operations (Human Rights Watch 2022).

However, France has started reducing its historical military presence in Central Africa. Following the end of Operation Barkhane in November 2022, in March 2023 France announced that its military presence on the continent would continue to be reduced. Starting originally in August 2014 to fight jihadist armed groups in the Sahel, Operation Barkhane, which represented approximately 3 000 French troops on African soil, officially finished in November 2022, following the coup in Mali. Led in cooperation with Chad, it was later joined, to a small extent, by the UK (2016), Estonia (2018) and Sweden (2021). Parallel to the withdrawal of Operation Barkhane forces, France's current permanent military presence in Gabon will be reduced from its current levels of over 3 000. The bases will be "Africanised" and become "academies" co-run by African and French armies. While the number of French soldiers present in the region will continue to decrease, there will be increased focus on training and equipment.

China is the second largest contributor to the UN Peacekeeping mission (MINMUSCA in CAR) (18.68 per cent), and about 2 464 Chinese Blue Helmets were operating in the Central African region. Since 2023, China has been contemplating opening an additional base in Bata, Equatorial Guinea.

Migration policies and practices of global powers

Global powers have diverse policies and practices regarding migration that impact their relationships with Africa, including ECCAS countries. Migration patterns and diaspora communities play a crucial role in shaping these relationships, particularly in terms of economic ties, political influence and cultural exchanges. However, armed conflicts and insecurities remain one of the main drivers of forced migration in Central Africa.

Key trends on forced migrations and external powers implications

Forced migrations in Central Africa is a multifaceted issue shaped by internal strife, foreign involvement and environmental challenges. Although external powers and organisations sometimes try to help stabilise the region, their interventions have sometimes contributed in mitigating the crisis. As of early 2024, the Central African region faces a significant forced displacement of people, with over 13.6 million uprooted due to conflict, insecurity and environmental challenges. This figure includes approximately 8.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 5.2 million refugees and asylum seekers across West and Central Africa (UNHCR 2024). The DRC continues to grapple with one of the world's most prolonged displacement crises, with over six million IDPs, primarily in the eastern provinces (UNHCR 2024). Conflicts involving various armed factions and foreign interests contribute to ongoing instability. In CAR, more than 1.4 million Central Africans have been displaced from their homes, representing almost a third of the country's total population. In 2024, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) facilitated the return of approximately 151 000 IDPs and 20 000 refugees, indicating some progress towards stability. The Lake Chad region, considered as the '*World's most Complex Humanitarian Disaster*' (Taub 2017, p.1) due to insecurities such as Boko Haram, climate change, predatory armies and extreme hunger, converging on a fragile region encompassing part of ECCAS countries (Chad and Cameroon), has seen

over three million people displaced due to a combination of insecurities such as Boko Haram, climate change, predatory armies and extreme hunger.

Addressing forced migration in the region has prompted a multifaceted approach that considers the complexity of the interplay between internal and external actors. Collaborative efforts involving regional governments, international organisations and local communities are essential to develop sustainable solutions and provide adequate support to displaced populations. The EU, through EUFOR Tchad/RCA (2008-2009; 2014-2015), has deployed approximately 4 300 troops to Eastern Chad and Northeastern CAR to protect refugees and IDPs, facilitate humanitarian aid delivery and ensure the safety of UN personnel.

France, through "Operation Sangaris" launched in 2013, has deployed up to 2 000 troops to CAR to disarm militias, protect civilians and support the transition to UN peacekeeping forces. The operation concluded in 2016, with responsibilities transferred to the UN's MINUSCA mission. The US, via USAID, allocated over US$ 100 million in 2023 alone to support food assistance and emergency aid in CAR, the DRC, Chad and Cameroon, with about US$ 47.2 million in the DRC and US$ 26.4 million in CAR for emergency food programmes (USAID 2023). The EU has also played a key role, with the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) allocating € 72 million in 2023 to the Central African region, including support for refugees, IDPs and vulnerable host communities (ECHO 2023). The UNHCR reported assisting over 1.5 million refugees and 3.6 million IDPs across the region in 2023 (UNHCR 2024). These coordinated efforts underscore the importance of sustained external engagement in responding to complex displacement crises rooted in conflict, state fragility and cross-border insecurity.

Table 5.15: Forced displacement and external aid in Central Africa (2024). Source: ECHO (2023); UNHCR (2024).

Country	IDPs	Refugees Hosted	Refugees Originating	Major External Aid (2024)
DRC	6.7 million	500 000+	1 million+	UNHCR shelter support for 911 000 displaced individuals
CAR	455 000	30 000+	738 000+	UNHCR budget of US$ 107.5 million for 2025
Cameroon	1 million+	475 000+	50 000+	UNHCR assistance programmes for refugees and IDPs
Chad	1 million+	600 000+	100 000+	UNHCR and partners providing shelter and protection
Lake Chad Basin	3.3 million+	N/A	N/A	UNHCR regional programmes addressing displacement

Table 5.15 highlights the disproportionately high level of forced migration in the region, with six million people displaced in the DRC, followed by CAR (four million) and Cameroon and Chad more than one million each. These trends reflect the region's prolonged armed conflicts, foreign interventions, and socio-political instability. However, the DRC remains the epicentre of displacement, while external conflicts like Sudan's crisis have triggered spillovers into neighbouring CAR. The humanitarian response, though supported by external actors, remains relatively productive to the scale of the crisis. This calls for sustained and coordinated regional and international engagement.

Migration policies

EU

Migration partnerships and agreements: The EU has implemented several migration partnership agreements with African countries, including ECCAS member states, focussing on managing migration flows, combating human trafficking and supporting development initiatives to address the root causes of migration (European Commission 2022).

Border control and readmission agreements: The EU has focussed on strengthening border controls and implementing readmission agreements to return irregular migrants to their countries of origin, including ECCAS states (European Migration Network 2022).

US

Visa restrictions and travel bans: The US has imposed visa restrictions and travel bans on certain countries, including some ECCAS members, based on security concerns. The US also provides limited refugee resettlement opportunities for migrants from conflict-affected areas (US Department of State 2021).

Diaspora engagement programmes: The US has programmes to engage African diaspora communities, fostering trade, investment and cultural exchange. The US African Diaspora Marketplace is an initiative to support African entrepreneurs by providing grants and technical assistance (USAID 2022).

France

Colonial ties and migration links: France has a long history of migration links with its former colonies in Central Africa. It maintains a flexible visa policy for students and skilled workers from ECCAS countries, while

also implementing stringent immigration controls for undocumented migrants (French Ministry of Interior 2022).

Development cooperation and migration management: France supports development projects in ECCAS countries to address the root causes of migration, such as poverty, conflict and environmental degradation (French Development Agency 2022).

China

Limited focus on migration: China has a limited focus on migration issues related to ECCAS countries. However, China engages with Africa primarily through trade, investment and infrastructure projects, with few policies related to African migration.

However, traders from ECCAS nations have established strong commercial footholds in Chinese cities like Guangzhou, Yiwu and Hong Kong, serving as key hubs for trade between China and Africa.

In Guangzhou, neighbourhoods such as Xiaobei and Sanyuanli qualified as "Little Africa" due to a large African community, with populations ranging between 20 000 and 200 000, mainly involved in wholesale electronics and textiles. However, stricter visa laws and economic issues have caused a decrease in the African population there, forcing many traders to move elsewhere. Despite obstacles like visa issues and cultural differences, ECCAS traders significantly facilitate trade between China and Central Africa, promoting economic growth in both areas.

Russia

Selective migration policies: Russia has selective migration policies, focusing on skilled migrants and students from Africa. Russian universities actively recruit African students, including those from ECCAS countries, through scholarships and exchange programmes (Tulle 2019).

Table 5.16: Migration policies and practices of global powers in relation to ECCAS. Source: Author from Tull (2019); French Development Agency (2022); USAID (2022); European Migration Network (2021).

Global Power	Policy Focus	Key Practices	Impact on ECCAS
EU	Migration partnerships, border control	Readmission agreements, development aid for migration management	Reduced irregular migration, increased border security measures
US	Visa restrictions, diaspora engagement	Travel bans, African diaspora marketplace	Limited migration, increased diaspora involvement in trade
France	Flexible visa policies, development aid	Student visas, support for development projects	Increased skilled migration, improved economic ties
China	Limited migration focus	Trade and investment engagement	Minimal impact on migration, focus on economic relations
Russia	Selective migration policies	Scholarships, student recruitment	Increased cultural exchange, limited broader migration policies

Influence of migration patterns and diaspora communities on global power-Africa relationships:

- *Economic influence*: Diaspora communities from ECCAS countries contribute significantly to the regional economy through remittances. In 2022, remittances from the African diaspora amounted to US$ 3.5 billion, representing 5 per cent of the region's GDP, with significant contributions from the

Congolese and Cameroonian diasporas (World Bank 2023). The flows across ECCAS countries show significant disparities, reflecting varying levels of diaspora engagement and economic reliance on these funds. The DRC and Cameroon are among the first recipients, with remittances estimated at US$ 1.3-1.5 billion and US$ 500-600 million, respectively, in 2022 (IOM 2020; World Bank 2023). In contrast, smaller economies like São Tomé and Príncipe and Burundi received approximately US$ 10.5 million and US$ 48.3 million, respectively. Notably, Angola's remittance inflows were around US$ 12 million in 2023, while CAR reported negligible figures (IOM 2017; World Bank 2023;). These variations underscore the diverse economic structures and diaspora dynamics within the region, highlighting the need for tailored financial policies to optimise the developmental impact of remittances.

- *Political influence*: Diaspora communities play a role in shaping political relations between ECCAS countries and global powers. For example, the Cameroonian diaspora in the US and France actively lobbies for political reforms and human rights in Cameroon, influencing foreign policy decisions (Mbaye 2019). Similarly, the DRC diaspora has been crucial in influencing international narratives on governance and human rights in the DRC. Organisations like the United Congolese Party in Washington DC, provide a platform for opposition voices, advocating for democratic reforms and garnering support from the Congolese community. These groups engage with global bodies to shape policies concerning the DRC (Morgan 2014).
- *Cultural exchange and soft power*: Migration patterns facilitate cultural exchange and enhance soft power. African diaspora communities in Europe and the US promote African culture, arts and values, fostering mutual understanding and cooperation between ECCAS and global powers (CIVICUS 2021). Cameroonian genres like *makossa* and *bikutsi* have gained international recognition, with artists such as Manu

Dibango and Richard Bona influencing global music scenes. The Cameroonian diaspora has played a pivotal role in this cultural diffusion, establishing record labels and promoting music that blends traditional sounds with contemporary styles. For instance, between 2011 and 2023, the Cameroonian music industry experienced significant growth, partly due to remittances from the diaspora, which funded music production and distribution (Sachin 2024). Also, Congolese music, particularly *soukous* and *rumba*, has had a profound impact on global music. Artists like Papa Wemba, Koffi Olomide and Fally Ipupa, have popularised these genres beyond Africa. The Congolese diaspora in France and Belgium has been instrumental in sustaining and evolving these musical traditions, often recording and performing in European cities (Friends of the Congo 2024).

Communications and media perspective

Global powers exert influence over ECCAS member states through cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges and media. ECCAS countries also use their own soft power to influence global powers in international forums, and through external and internal structures and processes of ECCAS or its member states in engaging with global partners. Communication infrastructure and local media are also used by both parties for communication.

Influence of global powers over ECCAS through cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges and media

Global powers exert influence over African countries, including those within ECCAS, using various forms of soft power, such as cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges and media outreach. These tools help shape perceptions, build relationships and promote values that align with the interests of global powers.

Mechanisms of influence

Cultural diplomacy

France is particularly active in cultural diplomacy in Central Africa, leveraging its historical ties with its former colonies. The *Alliance Française* network, French cultural centres, and programmes such as *La Francophonie* promote French language and culture, reinforcing political and economic ties. For example, France has about twelve cultural centres in nine ECCAS countries (Angola, Cameroon, Congo, Chad, Gabon, the DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe), which are involved in promoting French culture, language and arts through various programmes. They also serve as hubs for cultural exchange and cooperation between France and the host countries, as well as host cultural events (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022).

China uses cultural diplomacy through the establishment of about nine *Confucius Institutes* in nine ECCAS countries, such as Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, the DRC, Gabon, the Republic of Congo and Equatorial Guinea, promoting Chinese language, culture and academic exchanges. These institutes aim to foster positive perceptions of China and build long-term people-to-people connections (Alden and Alves 2017).

The US promotes its values through cultural programmes, such as the *American Corners initiative*, located in seven ECCAS countries (Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, CAR, the DRC and Gabon), which provides cultural exchange, education and information on US policies. Additionally, US-funded initiatives like *Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI),* launched in 2010, provide leadership training to young Africans, including participants from ECCAS countries (USAID 2022). Through its "Mandela Washington Fellowship", about 7 200 young leaders from sub-Saharan Africa have participated in academic and leadership training programmes in the US since 2014. While specific participant numbers from individual ECCAS countries are not publicly available, the initiative extends to all member states.

The EU engages in cultural diplomacy by supporting local arts, culture and media development through programmes like *Erasmus+* and *Creative Europe*. These initiatives promote European values such as democracy, human rights and good governance (European Commission 2022).

Educational exchanges

France and the EU offer numerous scholarships and academic exchange programmes to African students. France provides scholarships to over 10 000 African students annually, with 2 500 originating from ECCAS countries (Campus France 2022). The Erasmus+ programme, funded by the EU, offers opportunities for student mobility and academic partnerships between European and African universities, including those in ECCAS countries (European Commission 2022).

The Chinese government provides thousands of scholarships for African students to study in China, and as of 2018, over 6 000 students from ECCAS countries were studying in Chinese universities (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation [FOCAC] 2018). While specific enrolment figures for ECCAS nations are not readily available, the overall trend indicates a significant presence of African students in Chinese universities, yet, African students remain a notable presence in Chinese universities. In 2018, there were 81 562 African students in China, a 770 per cent increase compared to 1996. Although current detailed data is limited, reports indicate that China remains a popular choice for African students, with approximately 80 000 enrolling each year by 2024.

Numerous Chinese universities have substantial African student bodies. For example, 44.34 per cent of international students at Jiangsu University, or 4 061 individuals, are from Africa. Central South University in Hunan Province has 372 African students studying areas like civil engineering, transportation engineering, nursing and public health. The Chinese government continues to provide many scholarships to African students, supporting their education in fields such as public policy, international relations and engineering.

US Programmes such as *Fulbright* and *YALI* foster academic exchanges

and leadership development. These programmes help build networks of African leaders who are familiar with US values and governance systems (USAID 2022).

Media influence

France and the US utilise their state-funded international media outlets, such as France 24, RFI (Radio France Internationale), and Voice of America (VOA), to broadcast in the region, providing news content in French, English and local languages. These platforms help shape public opinion and promote the global narratives of these countries (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2022).

China engages in media influence through China Global Television Network (CGTN) Africa, which broadcasts in English and French, promoting China's development model and policy positions (Alden and Alves 2017). China media such as Startimes, Xinhua News Agency, maintain an extensive network across Africa, with twenty bureaus reporting from 46 countries, including ECCAS member states such as Cameroon, Gabon and the DRC (USC US-China Institute 2021). Through these channels, China shares its views on progress, leadership and global matters, with the goal of influencing public views and strengthening cultural connections in ECCAS nations. This media presence accompanies China's wider diplomatic and economic interactions in the area. Their reporting often reflects China's perspectives on development and international relations. For example, CGTN Africa's coverage of the coups in Niger and Gabon in 2023 exhibited a distinct anti-French and pro-junta orientation, featuring segments with local populations participating in anti-French protests.

Russia uses media outlets like RT and Sputnik to disseminate news and content favourable to Russian interests, challenging Western narratives and promoting alternative perspectives (Tull 2019).

International news agencies

Outlets like BBC, CNN, CGTN and Euronews maintain a presence in

ECCAS countries, influencing public opinion and policy discussions through their coverage. For instance, CGTN Africa has a significant presence in the region, broadcasting news and cultural programmes. CNN has partnered with CGTN on in-depth reporting concerning the area. A significant example includes their collaborative investigation with The Sentry on 15 June 2021, which revealed crimes committed by the Wagner Group in CAR. These international media outlets contribute to shaping narratives and public discourse within the ECCAS region, each bringing their unique perspectives and editorial priorities to their commentaries.

Table 5.17: Mechanisms of influence by global powers over ECCAS countries.

Source: Adapted from Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban) (2023); Alliance Française (2023); Fulbright Program Annual Report (2022); Erasmus+ Statistics (2021); CGTN Africa (2023); Central African Cultural Festival (2023); African Development Bank (2023); African Union Peace and Security Council Reports (2023); United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (2023); European Union Funding Reports (2018-2023); FOCAC Summit Reports (2021); ECCAS Digital Strategy Documents (2023); ECCAS Media Partnerships (2023); BBC and CGTN Coverage Analysis (2023).

Global Power	Mechanism of Influence	Key Activities	Countries Targeted	Impact
France	Cultural diplomacy, media, educational exchanges	Alliance Française, La Francophonie, France 24, RFI, scholarships	Cameroon, Gabon, Chad	Strong cultural and political ties, reinforced French influence
China	Cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, media	Confucius institutes, CGTN Africa, scholarships	Cameroon, DRC, Gabon	Increased positive perception of China, growing people-to-people connections

Global Power	Mechanism of Influence	Key Activities	Countries Targeted	Impact
US	Cultural programmes, educational exchanges	YALI, Fulbright, American corners, VOA	Cameroon, Chad, DRC	Enhanced understanding of US values, increased youth engagement
EU	Educational exchanges, media, cultural programmes	Erasmus+, Creative Europe, EU delegations	All ECCAS countries	Promotion of European values, enhanced academic collaboration
Russia	Media influence	RT, Sputnik	CAR, DRC	Alternative narratives, challenging Western influence

ECCAS's collaborations with local media and journalists

- *Journalist Training in Yaoundé*: In 2021 and 2022, ECCAS, in collaboration with the UN Office for Central Africa (UNOCA) and the UN Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa (UNCHRD-CA), organised a workshop in Yaoundé, Cameroon, to train journalists on reporting peace and security issues. The workshop aimed to equip journalists with the skills needed to cover sensitive topics responsibly and promote human rights through their reporting (UNOCA 2025).
- *Interviews and Op-Eds*: ECCAS officials frequently participate in interviews and write op-eds for international media outlets. For example, in 2023, the ECCAS Secretary-General gave an interview to BBC World News discussing the region's efforts to combat climate change and attract green investments.
- *Media Forums*: ECCAS representatives have attended global

media forums such as the World Press Freedom Conference, where they discuss the importance of balanced reporting on Africa. In 2022, ECCAS hosted a panel at the conference focussing on the media's role in peacebuilding in Central Africa (ECCAS 2021).

- *Art Exhibitions*: ECCAS has organised art exhibitions in collaboration with international cultural institutions. The "Central African Art and Culture" exhibition held at the Louvre in Paris in 2023 showcased traditional and contemporary art from ECCAS member states.
- *Music Festivals*: The annual Central African Music Festival, supported by ECCAS and held in various member states, attracts international artists and audiences. The 2023 festival in Yaoundé featured performances by renowned musicians from across Africa and beyond.

These initiatives are part of ECCAS's broader strategy to engage with external powers and ensure that its policies and projects are well-communicated and understood across the world.

Global powers exert influence over ECCAS member states through a combination of cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges and media presence, shaping perceptions and promoting their strategic interests. ECCAS has limited effectiveness in using its own soft power due to resource constraints, lack of strategic communication infrastructure and fragmented regional unity. While Africa's diplomatic strategies in international forums have achieved some successes, they face challenges related to implementation, limited negotiating power and internal divergences. ECCAS needs to strengthen its communication infrastructure, engage more effectively with local media, and build a robust digital presence to enhance its influence in global engagements.

Civil society organisations in engagements with global powers

Civil Society Organisations (CSOS) in Central Africa have a limited, but

growing role in engagements between ECCAS and global powers. Their involvement is generally focussed on advocacy, capacity-building, human rights monitoring and promoting good governance.

Relevant CSOs and their involvement

Advocacy and Monitoring: RECA-RCA actively monitors human rights situations and advocates for greater transparency and accountability in ECCAS engagements with global powers. For example, RECA-RCA has criticised certain agreements between ECCAS member states and global powers, such as China's infrastructure projects, for insufficient consideration of human rights and environmental standards (Mbaye 2019).

Women's Rights and Governance Advocacy: Though it is based in East Africa, FEMNET actively operates in ECCAS (Burundi) and focuses on advocating for gender equality and women's rights within ECCAS's engagements with global powers. FEMNET has engaged in policy dialogues to ensure that foreign investments and development aid consider the needs and rights of women and marginalised communities (FEMNET 2021).

These CSOs play a limited but growing role in influencing the region's engagements with global powers. While they are involved in governance, human rights advocacy and environmental protection, their participation in formal diplomatic engagements remains constrained (CIVICUS 2021). The effectiveness of CSOs is mixed, with significant contributions in promoting transparency, accountability and social justice, but limited impact on high-level diplomatic decisions. ECCAS engages with some CSOs, such as FEMNET and the Rainforest Foundation UK, to address specific issues like human rights and environmental protection (Mbaye 2019).

Table 5.18: Involvement of CSOs in ECCAS. Source: Author's analysis.

CSO	Focus Area	Key Activities	Impact on Engagements	ECCAS Countries of Operation
Central African Network of Human Rights Organisations (RECA-RCA)	Human rights, governance	Advocacy, policy dialogue, election monitoring	Moderate influence on governance and human rights issues	CAR
Rainforest Foundation (UK)	Environmental protection	Advocacy for forest conservation, community land rights	Significant impact on climate policies and forest management	Cameroon, Gabon, Republic of the Congo, DRC
African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)	Women's rights, health, education	Public awareness campaigns, policy advocacy	Limited influence, focussed on social issues	Cameroon, Chad, DRC
Oxfam	Poverty alleviation, humanitarian aid	Disaster response, development programmes, policy advocacy	Strong partnerships with international donors and governments	Chad, DRC, CAR
Open Society Foundations	Democracy, human rights	Grant-making, capacity building, legal advocacy	Influential in promoting democratic governance and civil liberties	Cameroon, DRC
Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA)	Climate Justice, environmental advocacy	Policy influence, research, education, community empowerment	High impact on climate policy and international negotiations	Cameroon, DRC
Green Belt Movement	Environmental conservation, women's empowerment	Tree planting, advocacy, education	Significant role in environmental conservation and women's rights	DRC
Indigenous Peoples of Africa Co-ordinating Committee (IPACC)	Indigenous rights, environmental protection	Advocacy, participatory mapping, policy engagement	Key player in promoting indigenous rights and environmental policies	Cameroon, Republic of the Congo, DRC

These CSOs collaborate with ECCAS and other regional bodies in order to have an impact on policy and advocate for many aspects such as human rights, environmental conservation and equitable resource management. Oxfam, for instance, has associated with the AU's Economic, Social and Cultural Council (AU-ECOSOCC) to improve civil society participation in Africa-EU partnerships. Organisations like the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) focus on monitoring the impact of critical mineral extraction on communities and the environment.

While there is no unique organisation for CSOs in the ECCAS region, networks like PACJA and regional forums facilitated by UNOCA and ECCAS provide platforms for collaboration and engagement among civil society actors.

CSOs' perspectives on ECCAS's relationship with prominent global powers

RECA-RCA

RECA-RCA views the ECCAS-China relationship as largely beneficial in terms of economic investments, but raises concerns about transparency, human rights and environmental sustainability. The organisation advocates for more stringent regulations to ensure that Chinese investments align with regional development goals and human rights standards (Mbaye 2019).

Regarding France, RECA-RCA acknowledges France's critical role in regional security; however, criticises its selective approach to governance reforms and its support for regimes that lack democratic legitimacy (Human Rights Watch 2022).

FEMNET expresses concern that ECCAS's engagement with global powers, particularly China and Russia, often overlooks issues of gender equality and women's empowerment. It argues that agreements should explicitly address the socio-economic impacts on women and marginalised communities (FEMNET 2021). FEMNET EU and US partnerships to the extent that they promote human rights, governance reforms and gender equality, however, stress the need for more inclusive

decision-making processes that involve civil society actors (FEMNET 2021).

Table 5.19: Assessment of Benefits from ECCAS Engagements with Global Powers. Source: Author's analysis

Global Power	Benefits to REC	Benefits to Global Powers	CSOs' Perspective
China	Infrastructure development, economic growth	Access to natural resources, geopolitical influence	Power imbalance, concerns over debt and human rights
France	Security support, development aid	Strategic military presence, political influence	Mixed benefits, concerns over selective governance reforms
US	Security cooperation, trade opportunities	Market access for US goods, regional security influence	Positive, however, limited to security and specific economic benefits
EU	Development aid, governance support	Trade benefits, promotion of EU values	Generally positive, however, limited by trade imbalances and non-tariff barriers
Russia	Military support, security cooperation	Arms sales, geopolitical influence	Concerns over human rights and lack of transparency

Civil Society Organisations play a crucial role in engaging with ECCAS and global powers to promote transparency, accountability and inclusivity in regional engagements. While these organisations have limited formal involvement, their advocacy, monitoring and capacity-building efforts help shape the outcomes of these engagements to align with local priorities. Enhancing CSO participation, promoting inclusive dialogue and ensuring transparent and accountable processes are essential for maximising the benefits of ECCAS's relationships with global powers and amplifying the voices of local communities.

Challenges, opportunities and recommendations

There are many barriers to effective engagement between ECCAS and global powers, as well as opportunities to enhance the region and leverage in global engagements, emerging trends and future projections in relation to global powers, and provide policy recommendations to optimise these engagements.

Main barriers to effective engagement with global powers and how to overcome them

Effective engagement between ECCAS and global powers is hampered by several key barriers, which limit the region's ability to achieve balanced, mutually beneficial partnerships.

One of the main barriers is the asymmetry of power and negotiating capacity. Global powers often have greater economic, political and military leverage, which puts ECCAS at a disadvantage during negotiations. This imbalance can lead to agreements that favour global powers more than ECCAS, such as trade deals that primarily benefit external markets or investments that result in debt dependency (Brautigam et al., 2020). To address this, ECCAS must strengthen its collective bargaining power by enhancing negotiation skills and presenting a unified front in discussions with global partners. This can be achieved through training programmes for negotiators and building alliances with other African RECs and the AU to negotiate collectively on key issues.

Fragmented regional unity is another significant barrier. Divergent national interests, political instability and internal conflicts among ECCAS member states weaken regional cohesion and reduce the bloc's ability to present a cohesive stance in negotiations with global powers. This lack of unity undermines ECCAS's capacity to negotiate effectively on issues such as trade, climate change and security, diminishing its overall influence on the global stage (ECCAS 2024). Strengthening political integration and promoting conflict resolution mechanisms among member states are essential steps toward overcoming this barrier. Greater political and

economic integration can help align national policies with regional goals, allowing ECCAS to act more effectively in global negotiations.

Limited institutional capacity and resources also present a critical challenge. ECCAS faces institutional weaknesses, including inadequate financial resources, infrastructure and technical expertise, which undermine its ability to engage effectively with global partners. These resource constraints hinder the REC's ability to plan, prepare and participate in international negotiations, implement agreements and monitor compliance (ECCAS Secretariat 2020). Investing in capacity-building programmes, improving financial management, and mobilising additional resources through partnerships and innovative funding mechanisms can help build a more resilient institutional framework.

Lack of strategic communication and visibility further impedes effective engagement. ECCAS currently lacks a comprehensive communication strategy and a strong digital presence, making it difficult to communicate its priorities, successes and challenges to global partners and the international community (ECCAS 2024). Developing a robust communication plan that leverages both digital platforms and traditional media will enhance ECCAS's visibility and influence. This strategy should focus on promoting the region's achievements, engaging global audiences, and fostering relationships with key stakeholders.

Finally, dependence on external aid and assistance is a significant barrier to ECCAS's autonomy. The region's heavy reliance on foreign aid often comes with conditions that may not align with its development goals, limiting its capacity to make independent policy choices. This dependency can be reduced by diversifying funding sources and negotiating fairer terms in agreements with global powers (UNCTAD 2023. ECCAS should work to attract private investment, enhance intra-African trade and explore new partnerships to reduce its dependence on aid from traditional partners.

Opportunities for enhancing African agency and leverage in global engagements

Despite the challenges, several opportunities exist for ECCAS to enhance its agency and leverage in global engagements:

- The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides a significant opportunity. By increasing intra-African trade and reducing dependence on external markets, ECCAS can strengthen its economic base and enhance its bargaining position with global powers. Participation in AfCFTA can help ECCAS diversify its economies, develop regional value chains and promote cross-border trade and investment. To fully realise these benefits, ECCAS should align its regional policies with AfCFTA goals and actively participate in its implementation.
- The region's vast natural resources offer another strategic opportunity. ECCAS countries possess substantial reserves of oil, minerals and forests. By developing value-added industries and negotiating better terms for resource extraction, ECCAS can increase revenue, reduce dependency on external aid and enhance its leverage in negotiations (World Bank 2023). Policies that promote local content, sustainable resource management and fair-trade practices should be implemented to maximise these benefits. Additionally, partnerships with global powers should prioritise technology transfer, capacity building and sustainable development.
- Digital transformation and innovation also present significant opportunities. Digital tools can be used to enhance governance, improve service delivery and boost economic growth. For example, digital platforms can facilitate regional cooperation, streamline administrative processes and improve transparency. Investing in digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy and developing e-governance platforms are critical steps for ECCAS to enhance its capacity to engage effectively with global partners.

- Expanding partnerships beyond traditional allies is another avenue for enhancing agency. By diversifying partnerships to include emerging powers (for example, India, Brazil, Turkey) and regional blocs (for example, ASEAN, MERCOSUR), ECCAS can access new markets, technologies and political alliances. Engaging in South-South cooperation initiatives and participating in diverse multilateral forums can help ECCAS build new alliances and reduce dependency on traditional partners.
- Finally, amplifying the role of civil society offers a significant opportunity. Engaging civil society organisations in policy dialogues and decision-making processes can strengthen accountability, enhance policy outcomes and amplify the voices of local communities in global engagements. ECCAS should institutionalise regular consultations with CSOs, involve them in monitoring and evaluation processes and build partnerships to advocate for human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability.

Emerging trends and future projections/ recommendations for Eccas's relationships with global powers

Several emerging trends are shaping the future of ECCAS's relationships with global powers:

- One notable trend is the shifting geopolitical alignments. ECCAS countries are increasingly diversifying their partnerships beyond traditional Western allies to include emerging powers such as China, Russia, Turkey and India. This diversification reflects a desire to maximise benefits, reduce dependency on any single power and leverage new opportunities. This trend is expected to continue as these nations seek to balance their engagements with a wider range of partners.
- Another important trend is the increased focus on digital

and green economies. Global powers are placing greater emphasis on digital and green investments in Africa. The EU's Global Gateway strategy, for example, prioritises sustainable infrastructure and digital connectivity, while China's BRI is incorporating green and digital projects. These areas are likely to become key sectors for future engagement, driven by both external and internal demand for sustainable growth.

- There is a growing scrutiny of foreign investments in Central Africa. Global powers and international institutions are increasingly emphasising sustainable development, human rights and transparency in their engagements with ECCAS countries. This trend is likely to influence the terms and conditions of future agreements, as these countries push for investments that align with their development goals and ethical standards.
- The rising influence of non-state actors, such as CSOs, think tanks and the private sector, is another trend to watch. These actors are playing a more significant role in shaping Africa's engagements with global powers through policy advocacy, monitoring and public diplomacy. Their influence is expected to grow as global and regional governance becomes more inclusive and participatory.
- Future projections suggest that ECCAS will play a more prominent role in shaping Africa's foreign policy and economic engagements, particularly in areas like trade, security and climate change. The emphasis on sustainable development goals is likely to increase, aligning future engagements with global powers around shared objectives such as sustainable growth, climate action and inclusive development (World Bank 2023). Additionally, digital and green sectors are projected to become key areas of focus, with increased investments in infrastructure, renewable energy and digital transformation.
- Promoting regional integration and unity is crucial. Strengthening intra-regional trade, harmonising policies

and fostering cooperation among member states will enable ECCAS to present a united front in global negotiations. A unified regional stance enhances Africa's bargaining power and promotes collective interests, leading to more balanced and equitable agreements.

- Developing comprehensive engagement strategies tailored to different global powers is also essential. These strategies should outline clear objectives, prioritise sectors of interest, and ensure alignment with regional development goals and human rights standards. By clearly defining its strategic interests, ECCAS can negotiate more effectively and secure outcomes that benefit the region.
- Enhancing capacity for negotiations and policy implementation is another key recommendation. ECCAS should invest in capacity-building initiatives to improve the technical expertise of negotiators, policymakers and implementers. Establishing specialised teams within ECCAS to handle specific areas, such as trade, security and climate negotiations, will strengthen the REC's ability to engage effectively with global powers.
- Fostering transparent and inclusive decision-making processes is critical for optimising engagements. ECCAS should institutionalise mechanisms that involve diverse stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, and marginalised groups, in policy formulation and engagement strategies. This approach will increase the legitimacy of decisions, ensure alignment with local priorities and enhance the effectiveness of engagements with global powers.
- Leveraging opportunities in the digital and green economies should be a priority. ECCAS should focus on attracting investments in digital infrastructure, renewable energy and sustainable development, seeking partnerships that support technology transfer, innovation and capacity building. Prioritising these sectors will position ECCAS as a leader in sustainable growth and increase its competitiveness in the global economy.

- Strengthening monitoring and accountability mechanisms is essential. Establishing robust frameworks to track the implementation and impacts of agreements with global powers will ensure compliance and accountability. Involving independent oversight bodies such as CSOs in these processes will enhance transparency and trust.
- Diversifying partnerships and exploring new alliances can reduce dependency and open up new opportunities. ECCAS should actively seek to engage with emerging powers, regional blocs and non-state actors, participating in South-South cooperation to expand its networks, access new markets and acquire advanced technologies.

By implementing these policy recommendations, ECCAS can enhance its engagements with global powers, ensuring that they are balanced, beneficial and aligned with the region's development goals.

Conclusion

ECCAS stands at a crossroads in its engagement with global powers, balancing between benefiting from strategic partnerships and maintaining regional autonomy. The region's rich natural resources make it an attractive partner for foreign investments, yet this has also led to increased dependency on powers like China, France, the EU, Russia and the US for economic and infrastructural development, as well as peace and security. The study suggests that ECCAS can capitalise on its geographic and strategic importance by fostering deeper intra-regional trade and investment, leveraging global interest to achieve sustainable development, and focussing on political stability. For ECCAS to remain competitive and autonomous, it must address challenges like non-tariff barriers, political fragmentation and regional security threats through collaborative governance, strengthened institutions and proactive diplomacy with global partners. While there are challenges, the opportunities for ECCAS to assert itself as a significant actor in global

geopolitics are immense. Optimising ECCAS's engagements with global powers requires a multifaceted approach that addresses existing barriers, leverages emerging opportunities and adopts forward-looking policies. By fostering a sustainable relationship with global powers, enhancing regional integration and focussing on self-sufficiency, ECCAS can contribute meaningfully to the realisation of the AU's Vision 2063.

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Endnotes

1 The signing of the Libreville Treaty in 1983 was done by eleven founding members, including Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Chad, the Central African Republic, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and São Tomé and Principe

2 Central African leaders have put in place a vision with the aim to promote "a common future, in environment of peace, security and stability, ensured by sustainable development, good governance, the growing improvement of the living conditions of citizens, freedom and justice", structured around six (6) priority areas 1) Political Integration, Peace and Security; (2) Economic and Financial Integration; (3) Physical Integration through the development of infrastructure and land use planning; (4) Environmental Integration and Rural Development; (5) Social Integration and Human Development; (6) The Pursuit of Institutional and Organisational Reform.

3 These initiatives included the Central African Energy Pool (PEAC) to coordinate energy issues; a plan to coordinate transport infrastructure and the launching of a free-trade area that would be established over four years (2004-2007), leading to a single regional market in 2008.

4 To meet regional challenges of integration, in line with the expressed will of the Heads of State and Government of the AU, ECCAS member countries adopted a strategic integration plan in 2007, and a vision for 2025 to make the region an area of peace, solidarity, balanced development and free movement of people, goods and services.

5 For instance, Cameroon signed an interim EPA with the EU, while other ECCAS member states did not finalise a collective agreement. The EU's approach to EPAs is tailored to specific regional circumstances, meaning that different African regions negotiated separate agreements rather than a unified ECCAS-wide deal.