



Council of the European Union
General Secretariat

Brussels, 10 November 2025

WK 15177/2025 INIT

LIMITE

**COPS
CFSP/PESC
COAFR
GLOBAL GATEWAY
COHAFA**

This is a paper intended for a specific community of recipients. Handling and further distribution are under the sole responsibility of community members.

WORKING DOCUMENT

From:	European External Action Service
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Discussion paper on a Renewed EU Approach to the Sahel, Foreign Affairs Council, 20 November 2025

Delegations will find attached "Discussion paper on a Renewed EU Approach to the Sahel" ahead of the Foreign Affairs Council, 20 November 2025

**Discussion paper on a Renewed EU Approach to the Sahel
Foreign Affairs Council, 20 November 2025**

The European Council of 26 June 2025 underlined that the stability of the Sahel and the wider region, including neighbouring coastal states, was crucial for the security and prosperity of the people living in the Sahel as well as for the European Union, and welcomed ongoing work, including by the EU Special Representative, on a Renewed Approach to the Sahel region. Ministers are invited to consider the recommended course of action presented in this paper.

The countries of the Sahel – Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger – and European Union have longstanding ties. The context and nature of their relations have, nonetheless, fundamentally changed. Disengaging is not an option. This Renewed Approach should be based on a clear expression of EU interests, staying true to universal values and principles, and a better understanding of the interests of Sahelian countries. In that context, it will also look to the Sahelian countries to express their readiness to engage with the EU, to identify mutually beneficial opportunities and address areas of divergence in a constructive and respectful spirit.

EU interests and guiding principles for a Renewed Approach to the Sahel

The interests of the EU in the Sahel include supporting peace and security, protecting and promoting multilateralism, defending universal values and human rights, preventing irregular migration and managing forced displacement, strengthening of frameworks for migration management, readmission and returns, enhancing border management and the control of the irregular migratory flows moving towards The Canaries and up north towards the Mediterranean, fighting against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, combating organised crime, containing insecurity, terrorism and radicalisation, supporting development and prosperity, as well as responding to geopolitical competition. Beyond the short-term leverage, the EU should also aim to sustain efforts for long-term investment and presence, aligned with the Global Gateway strategy.

EU action should be based on a flexible, country-by-country approach, mindful of the fast-evolving regional and international dynamics, in articulation, when and where possible, with actions and strategies of other regional and multilateral organizations in the Sahel. It should reflect a “Team Europe” spirit that ensures responsiveness, coordination, and flexibility, incorporating both short- and long-term considerations, thus ensuring a sustainable and sustained EU presence in the region. Three priority domains can be identified: (1) political and diplomatic engagement; (2) human security; (3) social cohesion, economic opportunities and people-to-people ties.

Political and diplomatic engagement

Improved dialogue, driven by mutual respect, is a cornerstone of the Renewed Approach. It should enable us to discuss our respective interests and, where possible, identify areas of convergence, consistent with national priorities to the extent that these align with EU objectives. It should allow for open exchanges on challenges of governance, rule of law, human rights, and humanitarian access and delivery.

All countries of the Sahel are signatories to the Samoa Agreement, which includes provisions for a regular partnership dialogue. When appropriate, this framework offers a relevant dialogue platform, including through the offices of the EU Special Representative for the Sahel.

Given the spread of misinformation, disinformation, inflammatory language, and other forms of harmful rhetoric in online and offline channels in the region, the EU should reinforce the scale and substance of its public diplomacy toolbox, placing emphasis on its effective local appropriation and the tangible benefits of EU action on the ground.

The EU will continue to actively support efforts to revitalise regional and international cooperation and coordination, acknowledging, in that regard, the role of bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the African Union (AU), and the United Nations (UN).

An integrated approach to human security

The EU integrated approach remains a relevant framework for engagement in situations of conflict and crisis. Investing in actions to prevent conflict is necessary to promote resilience and stabilisation. Protection of civilians and promotion and respect for International Humanitarian Law are imperative. In line with such human-focused approach to conflict, the EU should encourage enhanced dialogue on counterterrorism and organised crime, deploying a preventive approach in regions less affected by insecurity so far. Different models of security and defence cooperation should continue to be explored on a case-by-case basis through relevant EU instruments. The humanitarian-development-peace nexus and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda remain paramount.

Preventing and addressing the expansion of violent extremism, the terrorist threat and of non-state armed groups, within and from the Central Sahel, the fight against organised crime, in particular cybercrime, drug trafficking and trafficking in human beings, as well as the related fight against money laundering, are issues of global and common interest. We would benefit from engaging in targeted dialogue in this crucial area with the countries concerned and regional and multilateral actors, including on the root causes of instability.

Migratory flows are intrinsic realities of both the Sahel and the EU that can generate development opportunities as well as peace and stability dividends. Addressing root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement as well as fighting against migrant smuggling and the trafficking in human beings, are shared domestic, regional, and international concern. The return, readmission - including in line with the readmission provisions of the Samoa Agreement - and reintegration of irregular migrants and the identification of durable solutions for displaced persons remain central also requiring joint approaches. This approach requires strong coordination with the UN agencies on the ground.

Social cohesion, economic opportunities and people-to-people ties

The EU will continue to support and work with civil society actors, including local organisations and diasporas, that contribute to peaceful community relations, an active and open civic space, a more cohesive society, and can help deliver basic services to the populations, with a particular focus on the empowerment of women and youth. Because the people of the Sahel remain central to our relations, including the diaspora, education and culture must also be actively supported given their role in promoting mutual understanding.

The provision of basic services, the improvement of critical infrastructure, and the creation of greater socioeconomic prospects for women and youth are essential development catalysts, which require further investment by the EU, on a case-by-case basis. Promoting resilience to climate change, food security, and improved livelihoods is an area in which dialogue, cooperation, trade and investment can be strengthened, mitigating impacts on insecurity, forced displacement, and conflict.

Taking the Renewed Approach forward

The EU and its Member States will work together to engage the countries of the Sahel on the basis of the guiding principles and areas for engagement outlined in this Renewed Approach. They should be mindful that flexibility and responsiveness are indispensable to adapt to the rapidly changing national, regional and international realities and, thus, regular updates should be made to relevant instruments, policies and initiatives as the context and interests evolve.

The EU Special Representative for the Sahel will pursue his engagement with the region in line with his mandate and this Renewed Approach, working closely with EU Delegations on the ground and in coordination with all relevant EU institutions.