Greening Aviation through Global Aviation Partnerships – the contribution of the European Union

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Global aviation connects continents, economies, and people. The significant upsides of global aviation are obvious to an ICAO readership. At the same time, ambitious climate action is needed, and aviation must play its part. Global aviation faces the double challenge of ensuring its continued growth whilst significantly reducing its environmental footprint to meet the global Long-Term Aspirational Goal (LTAG) of net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

A global and widespread use of Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF), Lower-Carbon Aviation Fuels (LCAF), and other cleaner energy sources will be essential to achieve the LTAG. And it cannot succeed without global cooperation. No state, no matter how advanced or resource-rich, can decarbonise global aviation alone. That's why international partnerships, capacity building, and solidarity are vital components in the journey towards substantial decarbonisation.

In the 27 Member States of the European Union (EU), the ReFuelEU Aviation Regulation has set a minimum supply mandate, on fuel producers, for SAF in Europe, starting with 2% in 2025 and increasing to 70% in 2050. Various measures have been put it place to support the implementation of these new rules, including several financial incentives, a European Clearing House, research programmes and international cooperation.

This article focuses on the international cooperation dimension and explores how the EU is cooperating with Partner States across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, with the support of ICAO and of the EU Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), to incentivise SAF production across the world, thereby helping to shape a future where climate action, green jobs, and sustainable growth in aviation go hand in hand. The EU is committed to ICAO's "No Country left Behind" Strategic Objective and contributes to its implementation. And it's not just the EU alone: Since 2022, European entities have committed more than €20M to support environmental protection initiatives in civil aviation across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean.

International aviation operates across borders, but the emissions it generates know none and therefore require global efforts. The LTAG and ICAO's associated objective to achieve a 5% reduction in CO_2 emissions through the use of SAF, LCAF, and other cleaner energies by 2030 set the trajectory and will need inclusive, collaborative action in line with the Global Framework adopted at CAAF/3.

Many developing countries hold significant potential for SAF development and production, and this can support their local economic development.

EU funded ACT-SAF project in Africa-India: A Strategic Investment in Climate and Development

The EU is supporting numerous capacity building activities on the transition to cleaner energy in aviation, including in the framework of ICAO ACT-SAF programme with the EU funded ACT-SAF Africa-India project, a flagship initiative supporting 14 African States and India in laying the foundations

for sustainable aviation fuels. This programme forms part of ICAO's wider ACT-SAF umbrella and is co-implemented by ICAO (€1,6 M) and EASA (€2,4 M), making it the largest multi-partner efforts of its kind. The following map shows the participating States:

EU-funded ACT-SAF Africa-India Project, Partner States

This project exemplifies how the EU is supporting Partner States not just with funding, but with tailored technical assistance, capacity building, and long-term planning.

In the period 2018-2023 the EU also funded SAF feasibility studies in seven States, of which five in Africa (Kenya, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Cote d'Ivoire) and two in the Caribbean (Dominic Republic, Trinidad and Tobago).

Building the SAF Ecosystem

A major output of the ACT-SAF Africa-India initiative is the delivery of Feasibility Studies and Business Implementation Studies in participating States. These studies help States to understand their domestic SAF feedstock potential, assess infrastructure and logistical gaps, identify suitable conversion technologies, map policy, regulatory developments, and financing needs, deal with certification issues, and build direct supply lines.

By producing this country-specific intelligence, the project helps de-risk future investments and pave the way for real industrial development. The goal is not simply to produce reports, but to create the conditions for financially viable SAF production projects that facilitate final investment decisions.

These efforts are fully aligned with the EU's Global Gateway strategy, which supports sustainable infrastructure development and economic partnerships in regions like Africa, Latin America/Caribbean and Asia-Pacific. Green energy and aviation are strategic sectors within this strategy, and SAF lies at their intersection.

Empowering Partner States:

A key design principle of the ACT-SAF Africa-India project is local ownership. Instead of a one-size-fits-all model, the project focuses on national priorities and fosters domestic leadership. This approach has led to tangible progress, including:

- Country Consultations to engage national stakeholders and to identify SAF potential and priorities
- Capacity-Building Workshops that strengthen local institutions and expertise
- Regional Knowledge Sharing events that encourage peer-to-peer learning

The project's First Annual Workshop, held in Mombasa, Kenya in September-October 2024, convened over 220 participants to discuss SAF project de-risking and regional cooperation. In early May 2025, a Second Annual Workshop took place in Abuja, Nigeria, focused on SAF financing

and risk management, core topics for turning feasibility into reality.

These events help create communities of practice that will outlive the projects themselves, ensuring the sustainability of capacity built.

SAF as a Development Catalyst

Beyond emissions reduction, SAF represents a powerful opportunity for economic transformation. The diverse feedstock base (for example used cooking oil, agricultural waste) as well as green hydrogen could create demand for local supply chains. The development of SAF infrastructure offers the potential for green jobs, skills training, and rural development.

In this way, SAF can serve not only as a decarbonisation solution, but also as a vehicle for green industrialisation, especially in developing countries, in line with ICAO "No Country left Behind" Strategic Objective. Countries can position themselves as energy exporters in the future SAF market, boosting trade while reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels.

Recognising this potential, the EU is supporting, via its Global Gateway Initiative, countries to move from analysis to investment.

Supporting CORSIA Implementation

Another important element of the global basket of measures to address aviation emissions is the Carbon offsetting under CORSIA, a key mitigation measure to reduce emissions and incentivise the use of SAF.

The initiatives of European entities, either through the ICAO ACT-CORSIA programme or through dedicated technical cooperation projects, have contributed to the increasing numbers of States volunteering to take part in CORSIA during the Pilot Phase (2021-2023) and First Phase (2024-2026). By facilitating the implementation of CORSIA's Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) process, and in some cases the development of their national accreditation process, this has helped enable over 100 countries to effectively participate in the scheme. Technical assistance has also contributed to the development or update of State Action Plans for CO_2 emissions reduction in 18 States, reinforcing national ownership and institutional capacity.

Partner States supported by European funded international cooperation initiatives on CORSIA.

In addition, the "EU-CORSIA Africa and Caribbean Project", implemented by EASA and financed by the EU (€5,5 M), has been ongoing since 2019 and is due to end in October 2025. The project covers 54 States and has facilitated the engagement of Partner States in CORSIA. It has also helped more States adopt a domestic legal framework on CORSIA, including a national MRV framework. The project has increased knowledge sharing on the ICAO emissions unit criteria and eligible emissions units.

As CORSIA progresses toward its offsetting phase, EU-backed efforts help countries to strengthen their implementation systems and align their domestic climate goals with global aviation commitments.

The Path Forward: Coordination and Strategic Scaling

While progress on SAF is clear, major challenges remain:

High SAF costs, infrastructure gaps, policy uncertainty, financing constraints. Regulatory incentives and long-term targets are needed, and projects need de-risking.

To address these, the EU and its partners in the Aviation Environmental Protection Coordination Group (AEPCG) play a key role in aligning EU institutions, States, and stakeholders around shared objectives. This forum facilitates collective planning, efficient resource use, and a more coherent EU presence in international environmental cooperation.

Additionally, greater cooperation between donors - multilateral development banks, climate funds, and bilateral partners - can help ensure that funding streams complement each other and are matched to the priority needs of Partner States.

Conclusion: From Ambition to Action, Together

The fight against climate change requires global resolve, and this is especially true for the aviation sector. Through international partnerships, global climate diplomacy can translate into local impact.

By supporting countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, the EU is contributing to decarbonise aviation globally. Whether through capacity-building, feasibility studies, or financing readiness, these efforts are equipping Partner States to shape their own clean aviation futures.

In doing so, they are also shaping a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable global aviation system - one that leaves no country behind on the journey to net-zero emissions in international aviation.