

From Projects to Delivery: The Mattei Plan in 2026 and Beyond



by Filippo Simonelli

- Italy's Mattei Plan for cooperation with African countries has moved into implementation, with Climate Fund approvals, credit financing and multilateral facilities supporting a growing set of projects.
- Cooperation with the World Bank, African Development Bank and EU institutions has increased the finance available to the Plan, while placing Italian resources alongside guarantees, co-financing and contributions from partner institutions.
- The Plan may outlast the current legislature, although a future government would probably change priorities, instruments and political framing.

When the Mattei Plan was announced at the beginning of Italy's current legislature in autumn 2022, its political ambition was clearer than its practical content: the government led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni identified a first set of partner countries, priority sectors, and most importantly its narrative feature of "equal-to-equal diplomacy". Still, few initiatives were followed through beyond the announcement or planning stage, leaving observers and African counterparts sceptical. Almost four years after the announcement and two and a half after the formal presentation of the plan in January 2024, resources have been committed to first a set of projects, with European and especially multilateral institutions increasingly involved in their financing and preparation, providing the opportunity for an overall assessment.

Filippo Simonelli is a Research Fellow in the "Italian foreign policy" programme at IAI and PhD candidate at the University of Siena. f.simonelli@iai.it



The state of play of the Mattei Plan

In its **third annual report** on the advancement of the Plan, the Italian Government attributes 76 projects in eighteen countries to the Plan. This count covers a broad range of initiatives, including loans already issued, projects awaiting construction, feasibility studies, guarantees and programmes, even predating the Plan itself in some cases. In the meantime, the Mattei Plan has become a sort of buzzword in foreign policy circles in Italy and has acquired a wider European profile through its **links with the EU's Global Gateway** strategy and through the participation of European and multilateral institutions in individual projects. This has given Rome a stronger position when discussing investment and development initiatives in Africa with external partners.

Almost two and a half year after the formal presentation of the Mattei Plan, resources have been committed to first a set of projects

The **projects** grouped under the Plan differ considerably in scale and stage of implementation. A few examples convey the range of sectors, financial instruments and implementation stages currently associated with the Plan. In Tunisia, TANIT relies on 250 million euros from the Italian Climate Fund for a programme agreed with the Tunisian authorities to reuse treated wastewater from five treatment plants for agricultural irrigation; the financing has been approved, although construction has yet to begin. In Kenya, 100 million euros of a 150-million-euro policy loan for climate and energy reforms has already been disbursed. TERRA follows a different model, channelling credit to agrifood firms through local financial institutions, including Equity Bank Kenya. The proposed water programme for Brazzaville, in the Republic of Congo, is still at the feasibility stage.

The role of external partners varies similarly: the African Development Bank manages the Rome Process-Mattei Plan Financing Facility and adds its own lending to the resources contributed by Italy and other governments. A World Bank task force in Rome helps prepare projects that can later be financed and supervised under the Bank's procedures. The Food and Agriculture Organisation assists the African banks participating in TERRA, while an EU guarantee covers part of the lending risk. African governments are directly involved where the Plan finances sovereign programmes, as in Tunisia and Kenya; elsewhere, African financial institutions or multilateral organisations take responsibility for credit allocation, project appraisal or technical preparation.

Taken together, these operations rely on financial channels managed by several Italian and international institutions. Around 1.2 billion euros in authorised financing has been approved through the Italian Climate Fund, while SIMEST, a state agency that supports Italian companies abroad, has allocated 116 millions to 148 projects.

A further 29 million euros was committed through the Rome Process-Mattei Plan Financing Facility, a joint initiative with the African Development Bank that combines Italian and partner-government contributions to prepare and co-finance projects in African partner countries. These figures refer to different categories, including authorised loans, approved applications, guarantees and project allocations, and therefore cannot be treated as a single measure of implementation or expenditure. The publication of a dedicated **government website**, offering project-by-project information beyond what had previously been available, also marks a significant step towards greater transparency.

Although the Plan now relies on a more elaborate set of financial channels than at its outset, their accessibility remains scattered



across Italian and international institutions, each of which follows its own procedures and publishes information separately. Firms that already maintain regular contacts with CDP, Italy's national financial institution, SACE, a state-owned export credit agency, SIMEST or multilateral banks are more likely to find their way through this system, whereas smaller businesses may struggle to understand which instrument applies and where a project is in the financing or procurement process.

The greater operational role of African institutions does not, however, solve one of the earliest questions raised by African counterparts: to what extent do African governments help shape the Plan's priorities rather than participate in projects already designed elsewhere? The **Lobito Corridor**, developed with Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia, comes closest to this model, since Italy contributes to a broader regional initiative supported by African institutions and international partners. Across much of the remaining portfolio, however, public information says considerably more about implementation than about how priorities were identified or projects selected.

European backing with multilateral delivery

The Plan currently relies on two partly overlapping institutional channels: its links with the EU's Global Gateway strategy, along with European guarantees and financing, place it within the Union's broader approach to Africa, but project preparation, financing and supervision often remain with the African Development Bank, the World Bank and other international institutions making it fair to say that the multilateralisation has almost surpassed the Europeanisation of the Plan, at least from an implementation point of view. The other relevant feature is the increase in the role of civil society into the Plan, with the inclusion of representatives from African diaspora communities in the Steering Committee and

progressively expanding the presence of Italian religious, non-governmental organisations and universities in the structure of the Mattei Plan. Universities, in particular, have played an expanded role in several initiatives across different pillars of the Plan in direct connection with African counterparts, opening possibilities that go beyond the Plan's immediate timeframe.

The Plan has become a central feature of the Italian government's foreign policy

What lies ahead for the Mattei Plan in 2027 and beyond?

The Mattei Plan has become a central feature of the Italian government's foreign policy; part of its success may be explained by the **relative anomaly of its duration** when compared to other initiatives aimed at Africa by shorter-lived governments. As elections approach in 2027, the issue of the Plan's survival beyond the current legislation is becoming a talking point. The political forces face an acute polarisation in a line with the general trend in Europe and beyond, but if history provides lessons about Italian politics, it is that foreign policy continuity is common across governments of different political orientations. Moreover, despite early criticism after its launch, opposition forces have at least **partly recognised** the Plan's potential as a permanent feature of the Italian foreign policy. International **aid budgets are declining** in several donor countries, while European governments are **relying more heavily on guarantees**, development finance and partnerships with multilateral banks. In this setting, the Mattei Plan could survive beyond the current legislature because many of its main components, including support for Italian firms, cooperation with African governments and joint financing with international institutions, are not tied exclusively to the present coalition. A future government could retain this basic structure while adapting its geographical priorities, sectoral focus and political language accordingly.

The Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) is a private, independent non-profit think tank, founded in 1965 on the initiative of Altiero Spinelli. IAI seeks to promote awareness of international politics and to contribute to the advancement of European integration and multilateral cooperation. Its focus embraces topics of strategic relevance such as European integration, security and defence, international economics and global governance, energy, climate and Italian foreign policy; as well as the dynamics of cooperation and conflict in key geographical regions such as the Mediterranean and Middle East, Asia, Eurasia, Africa and the Americas. IAI publishes an English-language quarterly (*The International Spectator*), an online webzine (*Affari Internazionali*), two book series (*Trends and Perspectives in International Politics* and *IAI Research Studies*) and some papers' series related to IAI research projects (*Documenti IAI*, *IAI Papers*, etc.).

Via dei Montecatini, 17
I-00186 Rome, Italy
T +39 06 6976831
www.iai.it



Latest IAI Commentaries

Interim Editor: **Riccardo Alcaro** (r.alcaro@iai.it)
ISSN 2532-6570 | DOI 10.82088/IAIcom2632

-
- 26 | 32 Filippo Simonelli, *From Projects to Delivery: The Mattei Plan in 2026 and Beyond*
-
- 26 | 31 Nona Mikhelidze, *The False Equivalence of Sovereignty in Melnichenko's Essay in the Economist*
-
- 26 | 30 Clemens Chay, *Self-Preservation, Not Salvation: Deterrence, Diplomacy and the Gulf's Iran Problem*
-
- 26 | 29 Francesco Paolo Cioffo, *Rethinking the "Gold Standard": The EU and Strategic Alliances with Japan and India*
-
- 26 | 28 Chiara Gesmundo, *India's Multi-Alignment: Still a Winning Strategy?*
-
- 26 | 27 Agnese Pacciardi, *The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum: Promises, Risks and the Road Ahead*
-
- 26 | 26 Riccardo Alcaro, *No Deal, No War Is Still Trump's Way Out of the Iran Catch-22*
-
- 26 | 25 Giovanni Parente, *Not Europe's War? The Gulf Crisis and the EU's Maritime Dilemma*
-
- 26 | 24 Luca Cinciripini, *The Case for Northern Enlargement: Iceland Paving the Way?*
-
- 26 | 23 Albert Rakipi, *From Closeness to Strategic Partnership: Fincantieri's Shipyard Project and a New Vision for the Future of Italy-Albania Relations*
-