

1. INTRODUCTION

In December 2024, the European Organisation Worldwide Network (EOWN) surveyed its 14 European Business Organisation (EBO) members in Africa, to which 10 responded. The survey examined their experience in organising business forums both directly for their own membership and on behalf of member states and host governments in Africa. It also examined EBO member involvement with the European Union's own business forums.

For the purposes of this survey, business forums are widely defined as structured gatherings or platforms where business leaders, entrepreneurs, policymakers, civil society, and other stakeholders come together to discuss economic and business-related issues, share ideas, and build partnerships. These forums can take various forms, including conferences, roundtable discussions, or workshops.

However, when considered in the context of the European Union and its own Business Fora, the definition is specially defined as:

EU Business Fora are events promoting active dialogues between public and private stakeholders, both local and European. They are organised in partnership with partner countries, the private sector and the European Commission.

Within the framework of Global Gateway, EU Business Fora include activities such as sectoral panel discussions, business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-government (B2G) meetings, exhibition booths and field visits.¹

The survey found that EBOs have considerable experience and interest in organising business forums for their own members, for Member States, and for host governments in Africa, but not for the European Union.

¹ INTPA website: [EU Business Fora - European Commission](#) viewed 3rd, March 2025.

2. EBO SERVICES: UNLEASHING EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE IN BUSINESS FORUM

EBOs possess substantial experience in organising services associated with business forums for their members and stakeholders, such as member states, host government institutions and agencies.

QUESTION: Have you been involved in organising Business Forums in any of the following areas?

- **Organising Business Forums (On-ground logistics):** Only 50% of respondents indicated their involvement in organising large-scale business forums.

EBO Experience: Business Fora

Percentage

- **B2B Meetings:** The survey results show that 100% of respondents have been involved in organising B2B meetings.

- **Networking Sessions:** Similarly, 100% of the respondents have organised networking sessions.

- **Developing Market Insights:** However, only 30% of the respondents have been involved in developing market insights.

- **Developing Policy Papers:** The survey indicates that 80% of respondents have experience developing policy papers.

- **Assisting in Creating Panels:** A notable 100% of respondents have assisted in creating panels.

- **Identification of Panellists:** The same percentage, 100%, is reported for involvement in identifying panellists.

3. ENGAGING WITH EUROPEAN COMMISSION: INSIGHTS FROM EBO ON EU BUSINESS FORUMS

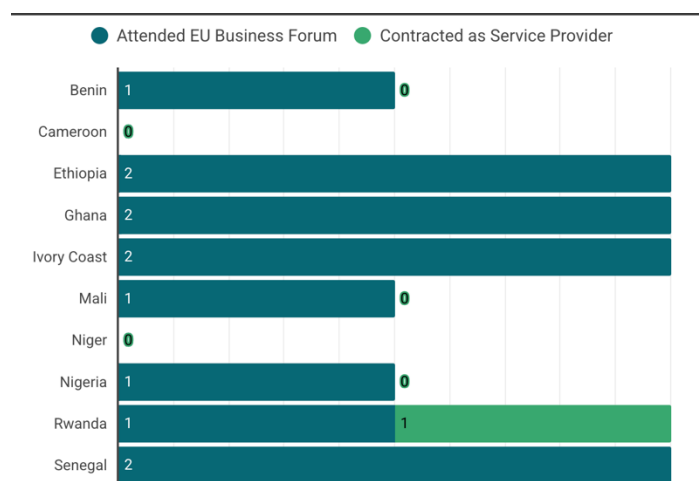
EBOs have substantial experience in organising various services relevant to business forums, such as B2B events, networking sessions, the development of policy papers, panel creation, and participant identification. However, they rarely participate in EU-organised Business Forums beyond the national level, nor do they often receive invitations to provide these services to the EU.

QUESTION: 1. Which EBOs in Africa have attended EU Business forums?
2. Have your EBOs been contracted [as service providers] for EU Business forums in your country?



Image 1: EBOWN Global Meeting 2017, coinciding with EU-Africa Business Forum 2017, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

According to the survey findings, 80% of EBOs have participated in business forums organised by the European Union. However, it is remarkable that only one EBO has ever been contracted by the European Union as a service provider in the market.



Graph 1: EBOs on EU Business Forum

4. EBOS AS SERVICE PROVIDER: HARNESSING THE EXPERTISE OF EBOS FOR SUCCESS

Despite the 10 participating EBOs in the survey not having been actively engaged in the European Commission-organised Business Fora, they have conveyed a strong interest in collaborating with the European Commission to provide relevant services on the ground.

QUESTION: Please list the services your EBO excels in and can provide as a Partner for the EU Business Fora

	Organising Business Forums	Organising B2B Meetings	Organising Networking Sessions	Developing Market Insights	Developing Policy Papers	Assisting in Creating Panels	Identification of Panelists
Benin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cameroon		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Ethiopia			✓		✓	✓	✓
Ghana	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ivory Coast	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mali		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Niger		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nigeria		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rwanda	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Senegal		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

- **Organising Business Forums (On-ground logistics):** A significant number of respondents, 40%, indicated the EBOs' interest in organising business forums. This service is fundamental to creating platforms for business discussions and collaborations, showcasing the organisational capabilities of these EBOs.
- **Organising B2B Meetings:** The survey results show that 80% of respondents have an interest in organising B2B meetings and can provide this service to the EU. B2B meetings are essential for facilitating direct business interactions and partnerships, highlighting the EBOs' role in connecting businesses.
- **Organising Networking Sessions:** All respondents, 100%, reported that their EBO have experience in organising networking sessions and is able to offer this service to external

contractors. Networking is a critical component of business forums, allowing participants to establish connections and explore potential collaborations.

- **Developing Market Insights:** Furthermore, 90% of the respondents can support developing market insights. This service provides businesses with valuable information about market trends and opportunities, aiding strategic decision-making.
- **Developing Policy Papers:** The survey indicates that 90% of respondents have expertise in developing policy papers for external contractors, including the EU. These papers are crucial for influencing business policies and advocating favourable business environments.
- **Assisting in Creating Panels:** Notably, 100% of respondents have confirmed interest in creating panels. Panels are integral to business forums, providing expert opinions and discussions on relevant topics.
- **Identification of Panellists:** The same percentage, 100%, reported similar interest in identifying panellists. Selecting the right panellists is crucial for ensuring informative and engaging discussions during forums.

5. EBO INTEREST IN GLOBAL GATEWAY SECTORS

Global Gateway is the European Union's initiative to enhance global connectivity and partnerships. It prioritises sustainable infrastructure development, promotes trade and investment, and boosts digital

Global Gateway Sector Interest in Africa



connectivity. By enabling collaboration between countries and regions, Global Gateway paves the way for fostering economic growth and resilience amid global challenges in the EU's key sectors: Climate and Energy, Health, Transport, Digital, and Education and Research.

Across the ten markets, there was considerable interest in sectors such as Energy and Climate, Digital, Transport, and Education and Research. However, limited resources may hinder the EBOs' capacity to fully explore the potential of these sectors, as their advocacy and lobbying efforts are primarily tailored to the interests of their members. Therefore, as advocacy and

membership-based entities, EBOs play a crucial role in implementing the Global Gateway Strategy, thanks to their established presence in international markets.

QUESTION: Which Global Gateway Sectors are interesting to your Market?

EBO	Climate & Energy	Digital	Education & Research	Healthcare	Transport
Benin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cameroon	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ethiopia	✓			✓	✓
Ghana	✓	✓			✓
Ivory Coast	✓	✓			
Mali	✓	✓	✓		✓
Niger	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nigeria	✓	✓	✓		✓
Rwanda	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Senegal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

- **Climate and Energy:** All respondents, 100%, indicated that Climate and Energy is a sector of interest to their market. This unanimous interest highlights the importance of sustainable energy solutions and climate-related initiatives for the EBOs and their respective markets.
- **Digital:** A significant majority, 90%, of EBOs expressed interest in the Digital Education and Research sector. This reflects the growing emphasis on digital transformation.
- **Education and Research:** 70% of EBOs are keen on the Global Gateway sector. Education and research are needed, and advanced educational and research capabilities are needed to support economic development.
- **Healthcare:** The Healthcare sector was identified as interesting by 60%. This interest underscores the importance of healthcare advancements and infrastructure in supporting the well-being and productivity of populations within these markets.
- **Transport:** The Transport sector garnered interest from 90%. This indicates a moderate focus on improving transportation infrastructure and logistics, which is vital for facilitating trade and economic growth.

6. EBOWN ADVOCACY WORK IN GLOBAL GATEWAY SECTORS

Additionally, EBOs were asked to ascertain which global gateway sectors are currently represented in ongoing advocacy and lobbying strategies. The survey findings revealed a complementarity among the sectors represented by the EBOs within their membership and the global gateway sectors. This not only offers valuable and high-quality ground information but also significantly aligns with the EU's interest in enhancing the visibility of European businesses operating within these sectors.

QUESTION: Which Global Gateway sectors does your EBO currently prioritise for Advocacy and lobbying efforts?

EBO	Climate & Energy	Digital	Education & Research	Healthcare	Transport
Benin	✓		✓	✓	✓
Cameroon	✓	✓			
Ethiopia	✓				✓
Ghana	✓				
Ivory Coast	✓		✓		✓
Mali	✓				
Niger	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Nigeria	✓	✓	✓		✓
Rwanda	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Senegal	✓		✓		

- **Climate and Energy:** All EBOs indicated that Climate and Energy is a sector currently considered for advocacy and lobbying. This high level of interest underscores the importance of sustainable energy solutions and climate-related initiatives for the EBOs and their strategic objectives.
- **Digital:** The survey results show that 40% of respondents focus on Digital Education and Research for advocacy efforts. This reflects the growing emphasis on digital transformation.
- **Education and Research:** 60% of respondents focus on education and research in advocacy efforts, highlighting the need for advanced educational and research capabilities to support economic growth and development in these markets.
- **Healthcare:** Only 30% of EBOs in the healthcare sector carry out advocacy and lobbying. This highlights the limited interest of EBOs in advocating for healthcare advancements and infrastructure that support the well-being and productivity of populations within these markets.

- **Transport:** The Transport sector indicates that 50% of respondents have engaged in advocacy and lobbying. This reflects a moderate emphasis on enhancing transportation infrastructure and logistics, which are essential for promoting trade and economic growth.

7. EU BUSINESS FORUM EXPERIENCE

The past experiences associated with European Union (EU) business forums, as compiled from the diverse survey responses, present an intriguing blend of positive insights, progressive developments, and constructive feedback. Furthermore, these responses highlight several noteworthy success stories that demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of these. This mix not only reflects the varied perspectives of participants but also underscores the ongoing evolution and significance of engagement within the EU business landscape.

Positive Experiences

- **Branding the EU through collaborative engagement:** EBO Ethiopia reported active participation in organising the 2022 EU—West Africa Business Forum held in Abidjan. This event was highlighted as a significant occasion that brought together companies from the EU with local partners, emphasising its importance for branding the EU on a political level.

Negative Experiences

- **Inadequate financial support:** Some respondents raised concerns about the inadequate financial support, which impeded their ability to organise a high-quality forum. The expectation was for EBOs to provide support in an honorary capacity, but the requests were unrealistic and did not have reasonable financial support.
- **Limited country focus:** According to the [EU business fora website](#), in 2024 alone, over 10 businesses have taken place. EBO Senegal reported that there had been no physical EU business forum in Sénégal for the last 30 years, which was seen as a missed opportunity for engagement

Constructive Feedback

- **Planned well in advance:** Forums must be planned well in advance to maximise their long-term impact. Previously, EBOs from the global network have been asked to organise business forums with just three to four months' notice. A minimum preparation time of eight months to a year is generally necessary to ensure meaningful representation of European businesses.
- **Reduced political emphasis:** EBOs advocate for more engaging and inclusive events that place less emphasis on political matters, thereby underscoring the frequently overlooked business components.

- **EBO Value and support potential:** In addition, EBOs can support coordination between EUD, Government partners and the private sector during the planning phase, as they have experience with forum preparation and coordination from EU forums and EU Member state business forums in connection with trade missions.

Success Stories

The Ghanaian experience: Following the *Ghana-EU business forum*, held on 3-4 July 2024, Accra, Ghana, EBO Ghana reported a strong interest in the EU business forum at the national level. The Minister of Trade and Industry expressed that such events should occur more frequently than every five years. This indicates a successful engagement and interest from local stakeholders in Ghana.

The Rwandan experience: In Rwanda, the EU - Rwanda business forum held on *26 and 27 June 2023* in Kigali attracted more than 100 European companies and 660 private sector-linked guests, including the Prime Minister of Rwanda and Koen Doens, EU Director General for international Partnerships, who helped open the forum with an emphasis on strengthening EU-Rwanda partnerships.

8. KEY FINDINGS

- **EBOs foster business connectivity in Africa:** EBOWN and its 17 African EBOs serve as crucial facilitators of business forums and networking events. The survey indicates that these organisations have experience supporting and organising business forums, B2B meetings, and networking sessions. This capability positions them as valuable partners for the EU in promoting business connectivity and interaction in Africa.
- **Harnessing EBOs' Business advocacy expertise:** EBOs provide strategic services such as developing market insights and policy papers, which are vital for businesses seeking to understand market trends and influence policy environments. These services offer the EU and its businesses access to critical information and advocacy support, thereby facilitating informed decision-making and strategic planning.

For instance, EBO Rwanda organises an annual advocacy week for its members with a focus on strategic areas such as taxation, import and export, agriculture, and access to finance. This initiative generates an advocacy report or policy paper, which is presented to the Chief Executive Officer of the Rwandan Development Board during EBO Rwanda's annual CEO Forum in collaboration with the government. Additionally, the outcomes are communicated to representatives of EU member states during closed-door policy meetings, which aim to inform them of advocacy needs. This enables EBO Rwanda to articulate a unified voice for Team Europe, while also providing EBCR with essential business insights to guide and advise new companies entering the market country.

The information and insights obtained from EBOs would constitute valuable contributions as a business forum partner and facilitate enhanced collaboration with businesses during the proposed EU business forums in third markets.

- **Value addition in pre-existing advocacy efforts on Global Gateway sectors:** EBOs' interest in Global Gateway Sectors, such as Climate and Energy and Digital Education and Research, aligns with global trends towards sustainability and digital transformation. This alignment positions EBOWN and its EBOs as strategic partners for the EU in engaging with these critical African sectors. EBOs are actively involved in advocacy efforts within these sectors. For example:
 - EBO Ethiopia has advocated for improving the Ethiopian Shipping Line Multimodal system, encouraging private sector representation.
 - EBO South Africa's Green and Circular Economy Working Group contributes to strengthening the Regulatory and policy environment in South Africa whilst also identifying partnership opportunities in the sector.

By focusing on areas that are pivotal for sustainable development and technological advancement, EBOWN and its EBOs offer strategic support to the EU in navigating and influencing these sectors in the African market.

- **Strengthening EU-Africa Ties, EBOs and EUDs Leading Sustainable Partnerships Beyond the Summit:** The ability of EBOWN and its EBOs to organise impactful forums that bring together EU companies and local partners underscores their role as significant players in fostering international business relations and enhancing the EU's presence in Africa. In the aftermath of the business summit, it is crucial for the EUDs, with the support of EBOs, to remain actively engaged in the participating countries. For instance, once the leaders depart from these countries, it is the EBOs and EUDs who must engage in follow-up activities locally. This underscores the significance of their role in ensuring the sustainability of these relationships, commitments, and efforts. It is vital in ensuring that the initiatives and agreements reached during the summit are actively advanced. Thus, the EBO's local involvement is essential for fostering sustainable relationships and maintaining the commitments, efforts, and collaborative spirit established during the event. By prioritising follow-up actions and continuous dialogue, EBOs can support EUDs to contribute significantly to the long-term success of the partnerships formed, ultimately benefiting all parties involved. Through this sustained engagement, the summit's objectives can transition from mere discussions into tangible outcomes, ensuring accountability and progressive developments within the economic landscape.

In summary, the value of EBOWN and its EBOs in Africa for the EU lies in their comprehensive approach to organising business forums, providing strategic services, aligning with key global sectors, and engaging in advocacy efforts. These elements collectively enhance their role as facilitators of business growth and international collaboration, offering the EU a strategic advantage in engaging with the African market.

9. EBOWN RECOMMENDATION TO THE EU

Following the findings of the survey EBOWN, together with its affiliated EBOs in Africa, puts forward recommendations to the European Union.

- **Engage EBOs in Global Gateway Business Forums:** The European Union should actively engage and involve EBOs in its business forums in third markets. EBOs offer valuable insights into European Union (EU) business sentiment and policy requirements. Furthermore, they serve as a practical, EU-wide resource for initiating global gateway projects through structured dialogue. EBO participation is crucial for fostering collaboration, improving the understanding of local markets, and facilitating trade opportunities across the region.
- **Involve EBOs from inception:** Engaging EBOs in the planning process of EU business forums, from defining objectives and scope to supporting the organising committee, selecting a date, venue, and format, developing content and agenda, business matching, marketing and promotion, logistics and technical setup, execution and on-site management, and post-event Follow-Up, can significantly enhance the value of these forums, particularly in third markets.
 - EBOs can provide critical insights into local business dynamics, helping to tailor forum agendas that address specific regional challenges and opportunities.
 - By leveraging their networks, EBOs can facilitate connections between EU businesses and local stakeholders, foster collaborations, and create pathways for investment.
 - Additionally, EBOs can assist in identifying emerging market trends, providing intelligence that can guide EU businesses in navigating the complexities of third markets.
 - Their involvement enriches the discussions at the forums and increases the overall effectiveness and impact of EU initiatives in international business environments.
- **Improve coordination amongst local stakeholders:** EBOWN strongly advocates for improved coordination among the implementing organisation, the European Union Delegation (EUD), the EBO and other stakeholders in the market. Enhanced collaboration is essential to ensure that all stakeholders achieve their objectives effectively and efficiently, leading to more successful project outcomes and fostering a sustainable partnership among all parties involved. Identifying a mechanism across markets would enable EBOWN to guide its host market EBO in the process.
- **Improve Business Forum outreach coordination at a regional and global level:** EBOs advocates for improved coordination of business forums. Frequently, outreach and visibility of forums overlap across various regions and countries. EBOWN welcomes the information sessions organised before the business forums. The Network recommends holding independent information, allowing for targeted and enhanced promotions across the EU. Complementing visibility and outreach for business forums should not be carried out together. This results in competition amongst EU Business forums. Therefore, it is recommended that a cohesive and coherent annual business forum program be developed. Ideally, this annual business forum plan should be finalised before the commencement of the forthcoming calendar year.

- **Recognise, value and remunerate EBO contributions:** It is important to consider the concerns regarding the expectation of EBOs to provide services for various business forums and similar entities in an honorary capacity. EBOs are enthusiastic about contributing to EU initiatives in the market where needed, and such contributions should be greatly valued and recognised. Thus, there is a need for better coordination in business forums between EUDs, EBOs, and Brussels. This includes better coordination amongst the various EU institutions to identify panellists from the European institutions.
- **Secure equal EU representation:** When business forums involve heads of state from the host country, secure equal representation from the European Union at the level of the Commissioner or Special Representative.
- **Foster Team Europe spirit with EBOs:** During the EU business forums and other high-level visits by EU officials, engage in meetings with the EBO, fostering collaboration in the spirit of Team Europe. This approach will facilitate a deeper understanding of the European business sentiment in third markets, ensuring that EU diplomatic efforts align with the interests and needs of EU businesses and further pave the way for leveraging EU political representation to further EU business interests in the market.
- **Maintain adequate lead time:** Advance planning and visibility are key to successfully organising business forums. This proactive approach facilitates a productive event and acknowledges the demanding schedules of both host government officials and business partners. Emphasising the importance of dialogue and collaboration in this partnership will significantly enhance the organisation of these forums.
- **Prioritise and target sectors:** EBOWN recommends that the European Union prioritise sector-specific initiatives at both country and regional levels. This approach will enable EBOs in the African region to effectively represent European businesses across various markets.
- **Initiate EU-EBO structured dialogue and collaboration at the regional level:** EBOWN advocates for improved collaboration among EBOs and EUDs at a regional level, which may be conducted either virtually or through specific onsite events. EBOs have been actively promoting cooperation across Africa. This regional collaboration has evolved to include both business-to-business discussions and EBO-to-EBO dialogues, strengthening efforts at the sub-regional and regional levels. There's potential for further development through partnerships with the European Union and local EUDs and EBOs, enhancing dialogue and collaboration.
 - An example is the EBO in Rwanda, which is conducting a survey and research focused on understanding trade barriers for European companies operating in East Africa. This will be followed up by a stakeholder meeting involving EBOs from East Africa, Government institutions, the East African Secretariat, TradeMark East Africa, European Member states and East African Embassies, to be hosted in May 2025 in Rwanda, under the support of an EU Grant project the EBO has with the EU Delegation. The larger perspective and intention is to create yearly EU-EAC Trade conferences for the region hosted in the different EAC countries with EBO's presence.

- **Leverage EU business for branding and political engagement:** The feedback from past EU business forums also highlights the importance of these events in branding and political engagement. For example:
 - EBOs could serve as a valuable resource for identifying panellists for the business forum from existing, well-established European businesses in the host market or the region.
 - Highlighting EBO's longstanding European business within the visibility strategy via social media, leading up to the EU business forum, could incentivise European companies aiming to penetrate the host market to participate in the business event forum.
 - Furthermore, considering the media network of EBOs, collaboration may be utilised to enhance visibility in the EU business forums
- **Leverage the EU's regional and subregional influence:** In light of regional and subregional dynamics, the European Union stands out as the only global partner capable of aligning policy and business interests as effectively as it does, particularly when compared to China or the United States. Consequently, EBOWN urges the EU to enhance its business cooperation within the African region, at both the subregional and regional levels, in accordance with the principles of Team Europe. This integration of policy and business collaboration is essential for fostering sustainable partnerships.
- **Aid to trade- Mind shift, deepen understanding within EU:** The EBOWN recommends that the European Union enhance its initiatives to deepen economic engagement with Africa, a region abundant in potential and experiencing dynamic growth. To facilitate this engagement, the EU must bolster the capacity of its EU officials, enabling them to gain a deeper understanding of economic cooperation and the complexities of international business dynamics.

10.0 CONCLUSION

We commend the EU for its ongoing efforts to promote business-to-business interactions and dialogue between EBOs, which have established a robust foundation for mutually beneficial partnerships between Europe and Africa.

To build on this momentum, enhanced coordination with European Union institutions, host market European Union Delegations (EUDs), and EBOs is essential on a global scale. At the national level, the EU should adopt a coherent and cohesive strategy to foster collaboration among EUDs, Team Europe, EBOs, and pertinent European institutions. Accordingly, we strongly encourage the European Union to amplify its business cooperation initiatives in Africa and collaborate closely with the EBOWN and its members to reach these objectives. EBOWN members are prepared to offer their support in this endeavour.