

Commission Communication – Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa

Context

The European Commission adopted a comprehensive strategy on building a stronger relationship with the African continent for mutual benefit.

Africa has been recording a steady growth, but still faces numerous challenges. The EU believes that progress is possible through deep cooperation at different levels, particularly to meet commitments such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which are central to the EU's vision.

In the strategy published in May 2020, five priority areas have been identified for a stronger partnership between the EU and African continent:

1. A partnership for green transition and energy access
2. A partnership for digital transformation
3. A partnership for sustainable growth and jobs
4. A partnership for peace and governance
5. A partnership on migration and mobility

Green Transition and Energy Access

Economic growth in Africa will increase pressure through higher use of energy, transport infrastructure, farming, and fishing, among others. To meet our shared global commitments for sustainable development and mitigating climate change, Africa as well needs to opt for low-carbon and resource-efficient solutions. For this, innovation will be key to drive the green transition. The EU will thus require investing in Africa to strengthen the scientific capacities and support local adaptation to technologies.

This will need to be complemented by a clean circular economy and sustainable value chains. The EU and Africa will require cooperating on responsible raw material extraction and trading that respect ambitious environmental and climate standards.

Growth will also expand African cities, which in turn will also require strong investment in smart urbanisation models to tackle pollution. It is estimated that energy supply will need to double by 2040 to meet the demand of population growth. This will require resilient infrastructure, access to cleaner energy and the maximisation of renewable energy sources as well as energy efficiency across all value chains.

The EU is proposing to support the implementation of nationally determined contributions that help devise long term strategies to reduce emissions and to further develop national plans. Another important initiative will be the Green Energy Initiative that will provide

green finance for sustainable energy and energy efficiency projects on the continent. Other actions will include cooperation to improve ocean governance, including the development of a sustainable fisheries and blue economy.

Partners for Digital Transformation

Africa cannot be left behind in the digital transformation of the economy, especially in view of population growth expected in the coming years. Digital infrastructures and digital entrepreneurship therefore have the potential to provide jobs for the 15-20 million youths expected to enter the workforce annually.

The EU also views the need for a robust regulatory framework for areas such as data and consumer protection, digital financial services, cybercrime and e-governance. This has the potential to boost economic integration on the continent, with other benefits including more transparency and better access to goods and services.

Digital skills and literacy are another important aspect of the development process. This will require investment in quality learning and vocational training opportunities by public and private institutions.

The EU is ready to partner with Africa to boost the continent's digital transformation by sharing technical expertise on regulatory convergence, data protection and by enabling investment in sustainable infrastructure, the digitalisation of public administration for more e-services, educational programmes and training opportunities.

Sustainable growth and jobs

The EU benefits from continued economic opportunities and job creation in Africa. It is in the interest of the EU to help boost trade with Africa through sustainable investments across the continent, improve the investment climate and business environment, increase access to quality education and training, and advance the regional and continental economic integration.

In this respect, the EU is already the largest investor in Africa on projects that include transport, clean energy, the agricultural sector, and private sector development. Direct investment will further be leveraged in the coming years through various EU financial instruments such as the European Fund for Sustainable Development and the External Action Guarantee.

The EU believes that Africa can become a more reliable trading partner for the EU through further economic integration. For this reason, it welcomed and supports the African Continental Free Trade Agreement that came into force in 2019. This creates a significant momentum for continental integration. The EU and the African Union have a common interest in collaborating for a rules-based multilateral trading system through the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The EU will therefore substantially increase environmental, social, and financial investments to promote sustainable growth and jobs, as well as to boost continental economic integration by sharing expertise on the EU's customs union and single market experience.

With currently less than 10% of African 18 to 24-year-olds in post-secondary education, the EU will increase efforts to improve quality education and training opportunities in Africa. It will also look to support women's empowerment by tackling discriminatory regulations and practices, also providing more access to knowledge, skills, microcredit, and finance for women entrepreneurship.

Peace and security / Migration and mobility

Long-lasting peace and security are in the interest of Africa as it is for the EU. These are the two conditions for sustainable development. The EU will continue engaging in conflict resolution through top political diplomacy, regular consultations, mediation, cooperation on counterterrorism, the fight against organized crime and trafficking in human beings.

Migration from Africa is a challenge for the EU, but also for Africa itself, Several African states host a substantial number of migrants, refugees, and other displaced persons.

The EU will remain committed to help African partners address refugee crisis at the countries of origin and to find durable solutions for refugees in the hosting countries. It will also continue with efforts to resettle persons in need of international protection in Europe.

For this, the EU will be strengthening its engagement to prevent irregular migration also to prevent the loss of life at sea. There will be need for cooperation on return and readmission. The Commission acknowledges that effective return rates require improving. Meanwhile, cooperation on legal migration provides mutual benefits by matching labour market needs on both continents.

Full text of the Commission Communication: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-eu-africa-strategy-join-2020-4-final_en.pdf

For questions or more detailed information please contact EU Affairs Manager Daniel Debono and Senior Advisor Mark Seychell from the Malta Business Bureau's Brussels Representative Office on infobrussels@mbb.org.mt

