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POSITION PAPER

# **WINNING TOGETHER**

A RENEWEd EU-Africa partnership  
in a multipolar world

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## WINNING TOGETHER

### A RENEWEd EU-Africa partnership in a multipolar world

The European Union and Africa are bound by a shared history, linguistic and cultural connections, and a deeply interlinked geopolitical future. In light of the pressing global challenges, the EU should aim to be Africa's main partner in trade, investment, Official Development Assistance (ODA), humanitarian assistance, peace and security, energy and digital transformation. African countries together constitute the EU's fourth-largest trading partner, while the EU is collectively Africa's largest export market; and the EU remains the largest development assistance and humanitarian aid donor in Africa. Yet, China, Russia, Türkiye, India and the Gulf States pursue assertive influence strategies across the continent, expanding their political influence and creating excessive economic one-sided dependencies to leverage them for political means. We should reinforce the visibility and coherence of the European Union's engagement and communication across Africa, highlighting the concrete results of our joint actions and the added value of a European approach based on mutual respect, transparency, and sustainability.

After more than 25 years of formal partnership between Africa and the EU, this is an opportunity to rethink our approach: placing people at the centre, aiming for strong democratic institutions and economic resilience. We need to balance support with clear expectations to create a trustworthy partnership that is resilient and future ready. The upcoming years must mark the start of a modern, results-driven partnership based on equality, shared responsibility, and mutual benefits.

#### Humanitarian and Development Action

With the suspension of USAID by the Trump administration and the reduction in global aid budgets by several EU Member States, the global humanitarian and development systems are currently facing an unprecedented funding crisis in essential services. There is no longer any political cost to cutting development and humanitarian budgets, even though for every euro spent on aid, nearly half is expected to flow back into the EU economy. And while financing mechanisms and partnerships are evolving towards a transactional, mutually beneficial cooperation among equals, ODA still remains a critical tool for tackling poverty, addressing inequalities, and supporting communities in vulnerable contexts - particularly in fragile states and least-developed countries. It is a key pillar of our development policy, values and part of the EU Treaties.

The EU provides humanitarian aid and development assistance worldwide, yet African countries have been core partners of the EU in this regard. As Europe, we must assume our global leadership role and demonstrate that we are a reliable and predictable partner, including in the field of development assistance. Our cooperation should be based on targeted, mutually beneficial partnerships which reflect shared priorities and promote democratic values, the rule of law, good governance and coherent engagement across development, migration, security and justice. They must be underpinned by accountability and deliver concrete results.

Sustaining our commitment to development assistance is essential, as any reduction of aid budgets would have severe repercussions across low- and middle-income countries in Africa, particularly for women and girls.

## KEY ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034 presents a pivotal moment regarding external financing. The consolidation of existing instruments, such as NDICI-Global Europe, and pre-accession and humanitarian assistance instruments and the lack of reference to the 2016 EU Global Strategy or the 2017 European Consensus on Development indicate a focus on short-term political priorities instead of a sustainable long-term strategy.

The Commission has also placed great emphasis on Global Gateway as part of the Team Europe initiative. Yet, it remains unclear how it is linked to human development indicators and the SDGs and the Paris Agreement. Global Gateway requires continuous evaluation, concrete governance benchmarks, and greater strategic direction, particularly when it is applied to fragile contexts which requires an integrated and special approach and strategy beyond Global Gateway, to set realistic, implementable goals in line with the EU's interests. It needs to support investments that are structurally aligned with EU ODA and foreign direct investment (FDI), enabling inclusive and sustainable growth, economic participation, and opportunity ensuring lasting benefits for local communities, as well as meaningful local involvement and ownership. For Global Gateway to keep its strong development dimension, it should be linked to measurable human development indicators and remain strongly anchored in the aid effectiveness principles.

### WE CALL FOR

- **Stable financing:** Create a harmonised system of financial assistance through better coordination between the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Central Bank (ECB), and national development banks to mobilise capital for key EU priorities, such as poverty reduction, and support ring-fenced humanitarian aid in the MFF. Seek to ensure that public finance is complemented by private donors.
- **Global Gateway:** Improve communication and share clear, accessible information about the projects, including a public, standardised central portal for Global Gateway project information. The initiative should be subject to periodic impact assessments through European Court of Auditors (ECA) thematic audits, comparing different strategic models and evaluating long-term sustainability and effectiveness.
- **Integrated approach to fragility:** Have an EU-wide systematic, tailored approach for specific fragility contexts in the new humanitarian communication by ECHO, in line with the humanitarian-development-peace nexus ('triple nexus').
- **Promote evidence-based debate:** Urge the Commission to conduct, without exception, thorough impact assessments and stakeholder consultations, including with African counterparts directly affected by EU legislation, and to base its proposals on the full evidence available.
- **EUaid:** Work towards a European implementing agency for technical development assistance, harmonising the current varying national frameworks and approaches in order to achieve efficiency gains.

## Peace, Security and Good Governance

We must strengthen EU-Africa Peace, Security and Defence cooperation, as peace and security are prerequisites for economic growth. In recent years, there has been a spread of conflicts, jihadist terrorism, military coups and state collapses, democratic backsliding and violent extremism in several parts of Africa - particularly across the Sahel, Horn of Africa, Sudan, Libya, and the Democratic Republic of Congo with the risk of spillover into neighbouring regions - yet many African actors and regional organizations have also shown growing leadership in conflict resolution and democratic resilience. These security threats, having deepened after the withdrawal of international missions creating dangerous power vacuums, have devastating effects on peace and development efforts in Africa. Moreover, aid cuts have reduced protection and prevention services, increasing gender-based violence, food insecurity, and overall rendering fragile areas more insecure, as well as weakening support for persons with disabilities and other marginalised communities.

We recognise that women and girls play a vital role in local conflict prevention and resolution and peacebuilding, especially human rights defenders, but regret that they often remain on the sidelines of formal processes, despite being disproportionately impacted by armed conflicts and are often targets of gender-based violence during conflicts.

Furthermore, Russia's hybrid warfare and significant military presence, in the form of private mercenaries or the state-controlled Africa Corps is detrimental to peace and political stability in certain parts of the continent: as a matter of fact, the reliance on Russian military and political support by military juntas in the Sahel has not permitted them to stabilise the regional security situations and has de facto led to terrorist groups gaining ground. China and Russia have broadened their influence also in the African media-sphere through acquiring local and regional media platforms, to spread disinformation, including pro-Chinese/Russian and anti-Western propaganda amounting to a full-fledged strategy of destabilisation and interference.

### **KEY ISSUES AND PRIORITIES**

We need to step up our efforts to promote peace, security and stability across the African continent and build resilience in fragile contexts to address root causes of conflict and instability before they escalate. Therefore, we need to adapt a broad concept of security to make clear that investing politically and financially in development, humanitarian action, mediation and reconstruction all contribute to Europe's security. Europe should collaborate with Africa to institutionalize and scale up EU-AU peace mediation and conflict negotiation practices. Furthermore, the EU must conduct a deep assessment on the mandates and roles of EU CSDP missions and operations and policies in Africa and a profoundly revised strategy for the CSDP in the Sahel region, as well as significantly expand the role of the EEAS in supporting African countries in managing their internal and cross-border conflicts, including engagement with non-state actors in order to increase stability in the region and to support the African Union in their goals of defending their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its Member States. Peace-processes should be gender-inclusive and responsive, including ensuring women's full, equal and meaningful participation in decision-making in line with the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

With regards to advancing democracy and good governance, more enhanced cooperation on electoral observation and democracy-building between the EU and African countries is needed. Similarly, it is important to institutionalise the parliamentary dimension of future EU-AU Summits to ensure a democratic contribution, citizen representation, and public oversight. Another key aspect for stability and trust in democratic institutions is the fight against corruption. We need to apply rigorous standards to all EU-funded projects in this regard. States that do not comply with such standards cannot be considered a trustworthy partner.

## WE CALL FOR

- **African-led peace operations:** Ensure predictable, long-term financing of such operations, such as the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and African Peace Facility, including through UN-assessed contributions.
- **Rapid EU response capacity:** Establish a rapid EU response capacity making use of existing instruments such as the European Peace Facility to counter terrorism, violent extremism and external interference taking into consideration the failure of the EU CSDP Strategy in the Sahel.
- **Enhanced security cooperation:** Strengthen structured cooperation with African partner countries through Europol and Eurojust by enabling real-time information sharing, joint investigations, the exchange of biometric and biographic data on high-risk individuals, and the participation of African partners in EU-coordinated operational task forces to disrupt terrorism and organised crime at their source.
- **Fight systemic corruption:** Provide support to strengthen democratic institutions and good governance by raising the capacity of public servants and ensuring transparent, merit-based hiring and promotion procedures.
- **Rule of law and good governance:** Promote strong, independent and accountable justice systems in partner countries by supporting judicial reform, anti-corruption frameworks and institutional capacity-building, recognising that respect for the rule of law is a cornerstone of stability, economic development and security. Integrate these principles more systematically into EU partnerships and cooperation instruments to encourage sustainable governance and public trust in state institutions.
- **Human rights:** Support the development of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights into a true continental human rights body and broaden support for it and similar institutions through capacity building, sensitization, as well by referencing it in its trade relations to African countries. Support accountability and justice mechanisms, and protection mechanisms for human rights defenders.
- **EU-African Media partnerships:** Expose foreign adversaries' manipulation attempts and promote EU-African media partnerships to strengthen shared resilience.
- **International diplomacy:** Secure a permanent African representation in the UN Security Council.
- **Women and youth in security:** Have the AU and EU implement the *Women, Peace and Security* and *Youth, Peace and Security* agendas and ensure dedicated funding to gender equality programmes through the women, peace and security agenda.
- **Conflict prevention through Global Europe:** We urge for long-term commitment to conflict prevention and peacebuilding and support the reassertion of conflict sensitive programming and conflict analysis as a formal requirement under Global Europe.

## Trade, Investment and Infrastructure

The economic partnership between the EU and African countries is characterised by a clear strategic need: for Europe, one key priority is securing a more sustainable and diversified energy and rare earth supply in the face of growing instability and global competition. This is vital to our green and digital transition. In turn, many African countries continue to face barriers to their full economic sovereignty.

Europe's response to these needs has often been too slow, mechanical and conditional. This has created the space for a growing influence from actors like China and Russia. We must break this pattern with clear strategic cooperation that works for both continents, as equal partners with the goal of building capacities, mobilising capital, and creating added value chains and innovation in Africa in order to empower local actors. And we need to be vocal about it: while China captures headlines with sweeping announcements like zero tariffs for all African countries, the EU fails to speak with one clear voice. The EU and AU should both make bold and visible commitments, and back them with concrete action reflecting our shared interests. To underscore the depth of this partnership, high level EU-AU meetings should bring together an equal number of heads of state or government leaders from both sides.

On infrastructure, Global Gateway is key for the EU to offer a sustainable alternative to competing infrastructure initiatives. Its 360-degree approach has the potential to support partner countries' development and create a level playing field for European businesses, but its impact is undermined by slow implementation, limited visibility and insufficient political ownership. Moreover, we are concerned that a number of Global Gateway projects are reportedly being implemented by Chinese companies, contradicting the initiative's objective of offering a credible alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative and of generating genuine local value.

Likewise, International Ocean governance is of high importance and our network of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) should be used as platforms to further develop our partnership for sustainable fisheries and rules-based Ocean governance and deepen cooperation, especially within Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs).

### KEY ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

For a true, equal economic partnership, funding opportunities for African actors are needed, which are African-led, transparent, and free of political strings while supporting the strengthening of the rule of law, without trapping African nations in unsustainable debt. Moreover, we need to empower African small businesses and entrepreneurs, especially through greater access to finance for SMEs and micro-enterprises and greater economic participation for women. We also need to ensure that procurement, guarantee, and due-diligence procedures are adapted to local markets and context-specific conditions so that local SMEs can access EU investment. In this regard, existing funds and programmes by the African Development Bank (ADB) should be prioritised over creating new instruments. European Investment Bank (EIB) guarantee instruments and blending facilities could help unlock additional public-private investments for Africa. EU financial instruments should be designed based on evidence from the mapping of regional markets, ensuring that they reflect economic and financial dynamics. The EU needs to particularly promote joint AU-EU projects in infrastructure, digitalisation and innovation. We should equally encourage investment from Africa's diaspora in Europe into productive sectors on the continent.

Regarding the EU's trade network, while several Economic Partnership Agreements have been concluded and some countries leverage neighbourhood association agreements, the bulk of trade partners on the African continent benefit from the EU's General System of Preferences. The EU shall present a new way forward on trade with the continent: the AfCFTA needs to be fully

implemented to further advance Africa's full economic sovereignty. Additionally, trade agreements should be streamlined and the role of Regional Economic Communities, such as SADC and ECOWAS, should be re-evaluated. We must support initiatives, such as the WTO Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement, as well as the continued implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. Drawing on past experiences, the EU shall further support an export-led development model, drawing on experiences in South-East Asia and Latin America.

Climate change is a shared challenge and opportunity for Africa-Europe cooperation. As such, the AU and EU should join forces and better advocate for their common goals at COP meetings. Additionally, the EU needs to provide its fair share of climate finance for African adaptation and mitigation, supporting initiatives such as the Great Green Wall, NaturAfrica and the Africa-Europe Green Energy Initiative and AgriFI and ElectriFI programmes. We also want to focus on concrete projects with African and European actors, such as the Trans-Mediterranean Renewable Energy and Clean Tech Initiative (T-MED), that aim to further advance renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and environmental stewardship.

Aid cuts by USAID and Member States have deepened climate vulnerability. Reduced early warning systems, resilient infrastructure, crisis training, and climate-adaptive farming leave communities vulnerable to floods, droughts, and food insecurity.

## WE CALL FOR

- **Rebalance the economic relationship:** Establish a Europe-Africa Industrialisation Pact that transforms Africa into a hub for processing, manufacturing, and innovation. Part of this Pact would be a European-African Infrastructure Fund in the framework and under the governance of Global Gateway, promoting long-term investment in transport, energy, water, and digital networks, including digital public infrastructure, such as digital ID and payment solutions.
- **Visible and effective EU action:** Work towards greater scrutiny, stronger EU visibility and clearer attribution of EU action, as well as faster and more coherent project delivery, in order for Global Gateway to effectively contribute to prosperity in the region.
- **Ensure transparency, accountability, and sovereignty:** Replace the current patchwork of opaque bilateral investment treaties with a Multilateral Investment Court that guarantees fair dispute settlement and upholds the right of governments to regulate in the public interest. At the same time, the EU should strengthen multilateralism - therefore, we shall further engage WTO members to join the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA) and support negotiations on plurilateral agreements under its framework.
- **Process harmonisation:** Work jointly with partner institutions to develop "one-stop-shops" aimed at increasing transparency, streamlining customs and administrative processes, and offer centralised information thereon.
- **Join forces:** Launch an Annual AU-EU Dialogue on Climate and Sustainability to coordinate policies and track progress.
- **United for sustainable oceans:** Upgrade our SFPAs to deeper partnerships to develop fisheries cooperation and rules-based ocean governance.
- **Affordable electricity:** Support the African Continental Power System Master Plan, the implementation of the African Single Electricity Market (AfSEM) and giving access to a Technical Support Instrument, to achieve a unified African electricity market and broad access to clean, reliable and affordable power across the continent.

## Human Capital and Mobility

We need to ensure we are investing in human development in Africa, driven by the needs of the people. Youth must be at the heart of a renewed EU–Africa partnership. We shall strengthen education systems and invest in young people and skills development, which is the foundation for long-term growth. Moreover, both continents need to uphold and promote women’s rights and gender equality, regarding education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, participation in decision-making and the labour market, and combat gender-based violence and harmful practices.

Health security is a shared global challenge and global health threats are growing amid major donor withdrawals and aid cuts and declining ODA by several EU Member States. The EU must now make its Global Health Strategy a reality. However, within the Global Gateway strategy, the health, research and education sectors remain underprioritized, accounting for less than 10% of flagship projects. The EU plays and shall continue to play a vital role in funding lifesaving health programmes in Africa, including HIV/AIDs prevention and treatment, local vaccine manufacturing, sexual and reproductive health and rights programmes, and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Thus, we support the new Global Health Resilience Initiative, announced by President von der Leyen. It is a crucial step to ensure resilience against future global health crises, as well as leverage the EU’s status as the single largest sponsor of the WHO.

Renew Europe envisions a future where mobility of persons between Africa and Europe is based on mutual benefit and opportunity. Our engagement in migration is grounded in international law and our international human rights obligations and stems from the need to respond to demographic change and skill shortages in the EU, while also addressing the burden of irregular flows and security concerns on EU Member States. Similarly, we must consider the long-term effects of underdevelopment and climate shocks on displacement and migration patterns, both from rural to urban areas and across borders. The Pact on Migration and Asylum lies the groundwork for this approach and needs to be fully implemented, before we can transition to a new strategy.

### KEY ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

The EU needs to ensure dedicated funding to gender equality programmes in line with its Gender Action Plan III and adopt a new ambitious Gender Action Plan IV. EU must also step up its efforts on sexual and reproductive health and rights programmes and make sure SRHR is a specific objective in its development programmes in Africa and that the new MFF has a specific allocation in its external action budget towards women’s health. Additionally, gender equality at work needs to be addressed in the EU’s external action in African countries.

In the medical and health sector, we aim for continued cooperation on joint health and pandemic preparedness, local pharmaceutical production, and universal health coverage. Cooperation should include financing as well as secondments of staff to increase the Africa CDC absorption capacity and ensure the good deployment of funds. This should also include targeted financing for DG HERA to power the implementation of the EU Medical Countermeasures Strategy on cross-border emergencies as well as the 2026 launch of the Global Consortium for Wastewater and Environmental Surveillance (GLOWACON) for the early detection of health and environmental threats.

We need to rebalance the migration dialogue, moving beyond a reactive, security-driven approach and return toward a comprehensive, partnership-based long-term strategy which reflects the complexity of mobility today. The fight against smuggling and trafficking must be combined with the strengthening of legal pathways, particularly for labour migration, and protection systems for refugees and vulnerable migrants, improving mutual recognition of skills and qualifications, and facilitating circular and regulated mobility, including through visa facilitation for African citizens,

are crucial. Visa facilitation should remain linked to effective cooperation on return and readmission, the secure issuance of biometric travel documents, and enhanced support for border management. And while protection must remain a cornerstone of EU policy, fair and effective asylum systems also require that those without the right to stay are returned in a dignified and lawful manner, supported by reintegration efforts. Only then, we will achieve a sustainable system and maintain public trust in our migration policies. Greater focus must also be placed on addressing the root causes of forced migration through job creation, fighting against corruption, boosting administrative capacities, promoting good governance, rule of law, inclusive development, public health and education, and supporting climate resilience. Improving mobility within Africa is as well an important part of regional development and economic opportunity that should be further encouraged and explored.

### WE CALL FOR

- **EU-Africa healthcare labour training and mobility:** Set up education and training programmes in partner countries to train additional healthcare professionals – adding more hands to the African and European labour pools.
- **Invest in African and EU joint health preparedness:** Make structural, long-term investments in local vaccine manufacturing as well as the Africa CDC. Enable the work of HERA and GLOWACON in Africa via dedicated funding.
- **Safe Mobility Initiative:** Set up “one-stop-shops” in partner countries to streamline access to and provide information on legal migration pathways – including labour mobility, resettlement, and family reunification – covering both humanitarian and non-humanitarian channels.
- **Ensure humane, safe and sustainable return and reintegration:** Support voluntary return programmes and sustainable reintegration strategies, rooted in respect for human dignity, human rights, and local ownership, while strengthening cooperation between EU Member States and countries of origin on the return of those who do not have a legal right to stay since this is a shared responsibility.
- **Boost youth mobility:** Improve access to programmes such as Horizon Europe, the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme, and Erasmus+, through the creation of a political EU-Africa youth exchange programme.
- **Maintain and strengthen global health funding:** Preserve the EU’s funding envelope for global health and immunisation, despite any potential restructuring, and continue support to global health organisations.
- **Enhance mobility of talent:** Scale up Talent Partnerships, launch the EU Talent Pool to connect EU employers with job seekers from partner countries, and facilitate visas for students, skilled workers, researchers and academics. Circular migration in the form of a European visa with multiple entries could allow for a structured and safe approach to immigration benefitting both continents while avoiding a brain drain in the African countries.
- **Boost mobility within Africa:** Support African-led efforts to improve cross-border and internal migration, including through regional labour migration frameworks and targeted skills development that reflects regional labour market needs in Africa and beyond.

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