



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

**CIVEX-VII/031**

**163rd plenary session, 20 and 21 November 2024**

**DRAFT OPINION**

**Regions and municipalities implementing the EU strategy with Africa**

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**Deadline for tabling amendments:**

**15:00** (Brussels time) **on 5 November**. Amendments must be submitted using the online tool for tabling amendments (available through the Members' Portal at <https://memportal.cor.europa.eu/>).

Number of signatures required: 32

Agence Europe



**Draft opinion of the European Committee of the Regions –  
Regions and municipalities implementing the EU strategy with Africa**

**I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR),

1. refers to the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950, which describes the development of the African continent as one of Europe's most crucial tasks; notes that the CoR and the Mediterranean local and regional associations active in this context set up the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) in 2010 to give local and regional authorities (LRAs) a voice in the Euro-Mediterranean process;
2. stresses the importance of EU-Africa relations in fostering economic growth, sustainable development and shared prosperity on both continents and acknowledges that, in a context of rapid population growth, urbanisation and pressure on public services, Africa's cities and regions have a key role to play in developing the continent through approaches that prioritise environmental sustainability and climate resilience;
3. asserts that, as the African continent is Europe's nearest neighbour, EU-Africa relations, which should be guided by the EU fundamental values, should be considered holistically and from a multi-level governance perspective, where all levels of government play a collective role in ensuring fruitful cooperation;
4. points out that despite recent European initiatives that take into account the diversity of the African continent, after almost 20 years of cooperation within the Africa-EU Partnership, the partnership's tools and operating methods need to be reformed to make it more results-oriented and in line with the needs of African partners;
5. welcomes, in this respect, the plans of the Member States, but recognises that they need to be coordinated. Supports the call to reinforce the focus on increasing private investment, enhancing cooperation, and promoting resilient infrastructure development while respecting the priorities of African nations. Points out that regions and cities in the EU have already concluded formal partnership agreements with countries, regions and cities on the African continent, giving them significant experience in developing partnerships, in some cases over many years;
6. stresses the urgent need to adopt a new approach in a geopolitical context characterised by unfair and unequal competition between powers, owing to the larger role played by China and Russia, the delay in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the political instability of some African countries, particularly in the Sahel strip, and calls for a review of the EU's strategic intervention framework;
7. stresses the importance of a renewed Africa-Europe partnership to address the vaccine challenge and identify the best ways and means to develop local vaccine manufacturing capacity in Africa, in order to ensure the continent's long-term health security and autonomy; asks that, at a time when mpox is spreading in African countries and the number of cases in the EU is rising, the

Council, the Commission and the European medical authorities send vaccines where they are needed; encourages enhanced cooperation between the EU and African countries in order to prevent the spread of the virus from developing into a global epidemic in the future;

8. points out that LRAs are vital for the SDGs, given that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that 65% of the 169 targets under the 17 SDGs cannot be achieved without proper commitment and coordination with LRAs; underlines that improving gender equality is central to achieving these goals, and urges that gender considerations be mainstreamed into all local governance and SDG-related initiatives across both continents;
9. points out that the EU's immediate neighbourhood in Africa through some of its outermost regions is a clear advantage in this partnership, and that the regional integration strategies of these regions should be taken into account through a wider neighbourhood approach in the European strategy for cooperation with the African continent;
10. notes the positive effects of European cooperation within the Africa-EU Partnership, but stresses that the visibility of the partnership and the EU's contribution must be significantly strengthened on the basis of past achievements. This goal could also be achieved by systematically cooperating with LRAs and their associations on the ground;
11. stresses the importance of the subsidiarity principle, not only for the EU but also for partners; calls for sub-national authorities in partner countries to be involved in developing priority objectives and calls on partner countries' national governments to demonstrate how they will be involved in implementing projects;
12. warns that a successful partnership requires the direct involvement of partner countries' LRAs, and considers that the decentralisation and localisation of EU operations in Africa are key to transforming the living conditions of the inhabitants of African cities and regions and to promoting the values of democracy and good governance;
13. calls for the capacity and mandate for EU delegations to work with sub-national institutions to be strengthened, with contact points dedicated to local authorities, which should help coordinate the EU's decentralised cooperation activities, in the absence of more systematic monitoring tools for those activities following the announced closure of the Team Europe partnership portal;
14. calls on the Commission and the European External Action Service to put on a par LRAs with civil society organisations, creating a fully-fledged unit responsible for LRAs within these respective institutions;
15. calls for a stringent mechanism for monitoring financial assistance to Africa, including regular audits, progress reports and a final evaluation. Funds must target specific projects with clear performance criteria to prevent corruption. The use of funds should be monitored in real time and funding suspended in the event of irregularities;

16. strongly reiterates its call to reinstate a budget line in the Commission's next multiannual financial framework dedicated to decentralised cooperation, and for LRAs to be transversally integrated into the Commission's and the delegations' various instruments and programmes, and for a more systematic monitoring mechanism to support LRAs in the EU's external financing instruments;
17. reminds the Commission of the importance of distinguishing LRAs from civil society, stresses that European LRAs should maintain relations with their African counterparts in various fields, such as education, municipal services, infrastructure, territorial economic development and support for local governance, and calls on the Commission to extend the consultation of civil society and non-traditional stakeholders to include LRAs and the international associations that represent them at continental and national level, in order to ensure their involvement in formulating development policies;
18. calls on the Commission and the EEAS to ensure that LRA contact points in the respective EU delegations celebrate Europe Day on 9 May and organise annual dialogues with LRA associations in order to exchange good practices related to specific thematic activities;
19. points out that there are currently no precise, detailed and exhaustive statistics on the total amount that LRAs spend on development cooperation, on the priority areas of cooperation or on the human resources used, despite the fact that this information is essential to ensure the coherence and synergy of these initiatives with the objectives of the Africa-EU Partnership, and stresses the need to provide the EU with statistical and evaluation tools for decentralised cooperation activities carried out by European LRAs;
20. is convinced that creating a digital platform would create links and strengthen cooperation between EU LRAs implementing projects in Africa, LRA contact points in EU delegations and the local authorities of those nations;
21. calls on the European Commission to task LRA contact points in the EU delegations with collecting data on all the ongoing projects carried out by EU and Member State LRAs, allowing the EU to include decentralised cooperation in the Team Europe initiatives;
22. suggests that a local administration facility be created for LRAs in the partner countries, in order to strengthen and improve local and regional administrators' capacity through training. A portion of financing for development should go towards obligatory training;
23. encourages the political groups of the European Parliament to set up structural bodies that work with similar bodies in the partner countries, building on the partnerships already in place and working in cooperation with their CoR counterparts, thus helping to strengthen the capacity of partner country representatives;
24. calls for participation in the Covenant of Mayors' initiatives to be extended to LRAs in the partner countries in order to contribute to the fight against climate change; points out that in the Mediterranean region, concrete local climate action is urgently needed as national policies do not respond to the acute challenges and therefore, actions should be tailored to local

circumstances and the needs of resident communities; to this effect, suggests to build upon the successful Clima-Med project and invites the South Mediterranean mayors to promote twinning between EU and non-EU cities located in the Mediterranean countries as part of the Interreg MED Programme; additionally, recommends prioritising climate resilience projects, particularly those focusing on renewable energy and nature-based solutions;

25. calls for efforts to be made to strengthen the Cities and Regions for International Partnerships biennial forum (formerly the Cities and Regions for Development Cooperation forum) jointly organised by the CoR and the European Commission, for digital platforms to be set up to provide clear information on LRA contact points and support for tenders for LRAs in partner countries and to ensure that these exchanges between the forums take place on a continuous basis;
26. is committed to capitalising on this forum to strengthen the links and alliances between the key players in decentralised cooperation and those tasked with anchoring SDGs regionally and locally; points out that all projects funded or supported in connection with this cooperation should be fully aligned with the SDGs, particularly in areas such as climate action (SDG 13), sustainable cities (SDG 11), and clean energy (SDG 7); welcomes, in particular, the increased cooperation between the European Union and the United Nations in this area, notably through EU-UN political dialogues on localising the SDGs with a view to developing a common perspective in international forums;

## **II. REDEFINING THE PARTNERSHIP WITH AFRICA**

### **Inclusive financing instruments that support LRAs**

27. welcomes the entry into force on 14 June 2021 of Regulation (EU) 2021/947 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe as a key step in the consolidation, coherence and complementarity of several instruments and stresses the need to ‘strengthen the role of local authorities as development actors’;
28. takes into account the conclusions of the report on the evaluation of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe)<sup>1</sup>, which stresses that the EU’s external action in increasingly difficult situations, including in fragile environments and those affected by conflicts or protracted crises, requires more sophisticated levels of knowledge and analysis;
29. expresses concern about the secondary role assigned to local authorities in the NDICI, as mentioned in its evaluation (March 2024) and warns of the consequences of failing to recognise local authorities as essential partners in the Africa-EU Partnership;
30. calls, therefore, on the Commission to follow the recommendations of the Council (24 June 2024) on access to funding under the NDICI and on the Parliament to create a new budget line

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<sup>1</sup>Evaluation of the European Union’s external financing instruments for the 2014-2020 and 2021-2027 multiannual financial frameworks.

for local authorities to fully participate in the strategic design, knowledge development, implementation and evaluation in the NDICI and the Global Gateway strategy;

31. welcomes the Global Gateway as the main instrument dedicated to international partnerships, but regrets the limited role given to LRAs;
32. notes the prominent role of the private sector in the implementation of the Global Gateway, and points out the importance of proactively mobilising LRAs, particularly at EU-Africa business forums, in order to better understand the expectations, opportunities and obstacles to investment encountered by private stakeholders operating in Africa;
33. highlights the crucial role of LRAs and their agencies – including those overseeing mobility, waste, health, the blue economy, water and energy, including hydrogen – in designing and implementing public-private partnerships (PPPs) at local level. They should have direct access to funding for investments relating to SDGs and value-based projects, with a particular focus on green infrastructure, community-based renewable energy projects and sustainable mobility solutions, without the state acting as intermediary;
34. calls for the creation of a ‘financing fund for African sub-national authorities’ directly accessible to LRAs in partner countries. As local authorities face significant obstacles in accessing national and international funding, a specific fund would allow them to finance projects that meet the essential needs of their populations and apply more flexible criteria when selecting such projects; to this end, calls on the next Conference on Financing for Development to address the issue of financing local authorities’ development projects;
35. commends the progress made in coordinating the financing instruments allocated to the Africa-EU Partnership, but notes that significant efforts are still needed to link short-term rapid response actions to long-term actions, especially in fragile and conflict-affected settings;
36. welcomes the creation of Global Gateway investment platforms in Pretoria, Nairobi and Abidjan aimed at providing an access point for national authorities, national enterprises and partner countries; notes, however, the importance of involving LRAs in order to ensure consistency with local economic policies and investment plans;
37. proposes boosting EU financial support for decentralised cooperation projects between European and African LRAs, with unconditional aid managed directly by the European LRAs to limit corruption and optimise the use of the funds, ensuring transparent governance and tangible results;
38. stresses, furthermore, that these investment platforms could also facilitate projects aimed at strengthening local and regional administrations in the countries concerned;
39. highlights the vital importance of LRAs in creating strategic, sustainable and secure transport corridors in Africa, such as those provided for by the Global Gateway (Dakar-Abidjan, Libreville-N’Djamena, Douala-Kampala, Dar es Salaam-Djibouti, Durban-Lusaka, etc.), which aim to integrate African and European multimodal transport networks, in line with regional and

continental frameworks, and to adapt these networks to the economic potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA);

40. stresses, in this context, the crucial role that intermediary cities play in the Global Gateway strategy, acting as connectors and enabling regions to operate in an integrated way, bridging the traditional gap between urban and rural regions, while facing very rapid urbanisation, which is forcing them to develop their services and infrastructure without access to the same resources as metropolitan areas;

#### **For an institutional architecture that promotes decentralised cooperation**

41. points out that as a fundamental pillar of democracy, local self-government must be further supported in Africa and regrets that the dependence of African cities and regions on national decisions and finances is still one of the main obstacles to decentralised cooperation between the EU and Africa;
42. stresses that European cities and regions represent around 70% of the EU's GDP and should have a greater role in defining the Africa-EU Partnership priorities in areas in which regions and cities generally have significant responsibilities;
43. encourages the promotion of a sectoral approach to decentralised cooperation and a stronger involvement of local and regional administrations in defining priorities and actions in areas such as energy, mobility, connectivity, environment and climate;
44. points out that the active involvement of LRAs in the implementation of the Africa-EU Partnership allows the intercontinental institutional architecture to be strengthened, particularly in the face of global crises, and calls on the European Commission to involve LRAs in developing the Africa-EU Partnership's priorities that have a territorial impact (e.g. energy efficiency, environment, climate change adaptation, transport connectivity, public administration decentralisation and reform, and support for civil society);
45. proposes that a pilot cooperation project be set up in one of the above-mentioned areas, to be developed and implemented by LRAs and financed by the Commission, in the form of a European Parliament pilot project;
46. highlights the importance of the Nicosia initiative for cooperation between European and Libyan municipalities, which is a very good example of how the involvement of regions and cities in the European strategy with Africa can be beneficial, especially in fragile settings;
47. suggests that the Commission actively involve LRAs in preparing EU-AU summits and that the Committee of the Regions be represented at the summits and ministerial meetings between the EU and Africa;
48. highlights the importance of the AfCFTA, which offers major opportunities for Africa's economic transformation, and calls for LRAs to play a greater role in its implementation in order to support the AfCFTA's objectives to reduce trade barriers, harmonise regulations and

standards and improve cross-border investment, thus fostering regional integration and cooperation;

49. stresses the importance of further developing regional economic and political cooperation on the African continent, in particular through regional free trade areas between African countries;
50. highlights the importance of European territorial cooperation (Interreg) – and especially of territorial cooperation programmes with African partner countries and members of their governing bodies – as this instrument has a direct positive impact on cooperation between the outermost regions and Africa, and calls for this importance to be recognised and for the potential of this instrument to be enhanced in the future strategy;
51. encourages the creation of channels and platforms for political dialogue between members of the Committee of the Regions and relevant delegations from the European Parliament; recommends that a member of the Committee of the Regions attend the meetings of these delegations; proposes that a body be created for dialogue and consultation between members of the CoR's CIVEX commission and the Africa and Middle East and North Africa (MENA) departments of the European External Action Service;
52. stresses the need to give LRAs a clearly defined role in defining and implementing European public diplomacy, in particular in order to support the efforts of EU delegations in their dialogues with citizens, the private sector, the media and the public in Africa, and to ensure diversity among stakeholders;
53. points out the urgent need to establish strong partnerships to combat illicit financial flows between Africa and Europe and welcomes the new Team Europe initiative on illicit financial flows and transnational organised crime; suggests that part of the EUR 450 million budget allocated to this initiative be put towards setting up a platform for exchanging and analysing best practices between local and regional administrations on both continents in order to strengthen their joint action in the fight against financial crimes;

### **Capacity building**

54. calls for the creation of an annual programme to support capacity building and knowledge exchanges with the participation of African and European elected representatives in order to strengthen the framework for the involvement of sub-national actors from the EU Member States, including younger generations, in the effective implementation of the Africa-EU Partnership;
55. calls on the European Commission to create a virtual local and regional public administration academy to strengthen local and regional administrations' capacities in order to implement the Africa-EU Partnership;
56. proposes extending participation in EU exchange programmes (the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) programme for civil servants and experts and twinning programmes for public officials) to include African LRAs;

57. welcomes the European Commission's April 2024 launch of new regional initiatives in Africa to boost mobility, in particular academic mobility, and for transferring the knowledge and skills of young people, and stresses the importance of involving LRAs in their design and implementation, notably in connection with the new Africa-Europe Youth Academy and as part of the activities under the UNITWIN/UNESCO programme, which in some countries already has an established network of chairs which is very active and fruitful in its relations with the African continent;

## **Migration**

58. calls for the visa policy for young professionals, artists and local elected representatives, especially mayors in partner countries, to be revamped and opposes agreements with non-democratic countries paid by the EU to stem migrant flows;

59. reiterates its call for the new European Commission to propose legislation on legal migration that would help the EU deal with labour shortages, depopulation, etc. in accordance with the EU's fundamental principles and values; stresses the need to focus on the root causes of irregular migration, efforts to enhance border management, and safe and regular pathways for migration;

60. is against the criminalisation of asylum seekers and migrants, and stresses the urgent need to increase the capacity of law enforcement agencies to combat criminal organisations and put an end to their illegal activities. The EU should continue to improve law enforcement and judicial cooperation with those countries whose national legal frameworks are abused by criminals<sup>2</sup>;

61. encourages the Commission to establish a European plan for the recruitment of foreign labour to facilitate the migration of workers from African third countries, while stressing that, although this is not a magic bullet to tackle labour shortages, it is undoubtedly a significant part of the solution; in this vein, points out the importance of developing relevant technical and vocational training opportunities at local level. Given that vocational training is usually a local competence, decentralised cooperation could greatly help African local authorities to develop this service, drawing on the experience of their local European partners;

62. believes that LRAs can also facilitate smoother EU public communication on migration and the signing of agreements based on the principle of mutual benefit, in addition to conditional approaches to negotiating the return of migrants, as well as improved relations with countries of origin – a factor which is becoming increasingly important in the current geopolitical context;

## **Energy, research and innovation**

63. recognises the interdependence of the EU and Africa in terms of energy and the importance of the existing partnership for a just and sustainable energy transition; calls to this effect for

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<sup>2</sup> CDR 5442/2023 (Rapporteur: Matteo Luigi BIANCHI).

strengthened efforts to develop Africa's green energy potential and foster its green industrialisation;

64. maintains that LRAs should play a greater role in formulating and implementing enhanced cooperation between the EU and Africa in the field of energy, including within the Africa-EU Green Energy Initiative (AEGEI), by strengthening local value chains;
65. welcomes the adoption of the new joint AU-EU Innovation Agenda aimed at accelerating the translation of research and innovation into a tangible positive impact on the ground, namely products, services, businesses and jobs, in Africa and Europe;
66. is pleased to note that the objectives of this agenda are based on the principles of co-creation and co-ownership and were developed in accordance with the SDGs, and notes that the LRAs should contribute directly to the implementation of this agenda through knowledge exchanges, in particular in the fields of agriculture, the environment and biotechnology;
67. calls for enhanced cooperation between the EU and African governments to create economic and professional opportunities, by supporting local incubators, training programmes, entrepreneurship programmes and business partnerships in order to foster the local employment of young graduates, making talented African individuals a driver of growth for their countries and thereby reducing dependence on migration;
68. stresses that LRAs have a crucial role to play in addressing innovation gaps identified by the agenda in five priority areas: a) the innovation ecosystem; b) innovation management; c) knowledge exchange, including technology transfer; d) access to financing; and e) human capacity development;
69. believes that LRAs could also help promote the AU-EU Innovation Agenda and ensure that it is able to achieve its ambition of connecting a wide range of research and innovation actors and ecosystems to the interface between Africa and Europe, thereby helping to implement the joint AU-EU Innovation Agenda;
70. encourages the European Commission to step up investment in education and research through the Africa-EU Partnership.

Brussels, 20 November 2024

### III. PROCEDURE

<b>Title</b>	Regions and Municipalities implementing the EU Strategy with Africa
<b>Reference(s)</b>	N/A
<b>Legal basis</b>	Own-initiative (Article 307(4))
<b>Procedural basis</b>	Rule 41 b) ii))
<b>Date of Council / EP referral / Date of Commission letter</b>	N/A
<b>Date of Bureau/President's decision</b>	16/4/2024
<b>Commission responsible</b>	CIVEX-VII – 7th Mandate – Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs
<b>Rapporteur</b>	Guido MILANA (IT/Renew-EU)
<b>Discussed in commission</b>	8/7/2024
<b>Date adopted by commission</b>	24/9/2024
<b>Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)</b>	Unanimity
<b>Date adopted in plenary</b>	20/11/2024
<b>Previous Committee opinions</b>	Regions' and Cities' contribution to the development of Africa Neighbourhood and the World
<b>Subsidiarity reference</b>	N/A