Position Paper Summary
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A new EU-Africa strategy that works for people and the planet

In March 2020, the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) issued a joint communication outlining its proposal for a new comprehensive strategy with Africa. This is meant to serve as a basis for future discussions amongst and between European and African stakeholders, and to pave the way to the 6th African Union (AU)-European Union (EU) Summit and to a revamped EU-Africa partnership.

Based on an analysis of the EC’s joint communication, and aiming at shaping the upcoming discussions, this joint position paper presents our main issues of concern and our key recommendations. Together with Caritas Africa, we support an approach grounded in the concept of ‘care for the common good.’ Such an approach, especially considering the anticipated consequences of Covid-19 on African countries, is needed now more than ever.

2030 Agenda as the guiding framework of the new Africa strategy

The UN’s 2030 Agenda is referenced as the overall guiding framework of the strategy. Yet, its principles are not reflected in the proposed EU-Africa partnership. The approach to the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the Agenda is sectorial and fragmented. It disregards the indivisible nature of the Agenda and the interconnectedness of its goals.

We are concerned this will lead to incoherent policies and, ultimately, to outcomes further away from achieving sustainable development. We thus recommend the EU to truly ground the new Africa strategy in the principles and priorities of the 2030 Agenda, the European Consensus on Development, the Agenda 2063, and the Paris Agreement, respecting the interconnectedness of the sustainable development goals, the indivisibility of human rights, as well as planetary boundaries.

Poverty and inequalities reduction as the primary objectives of the new Africa strategy

The proposed Africa strategy pays limited attention to two major challenges in Africa: fighting poverty and reducing inequalities. Economic progress is identified as the main focus of action. We thus recommend the EU to centre the future EU-Africa partnership on primary objectives of redressing imbalances and inequalities, eradicating poverty and fostering human development, directing targeted attention to the furthest behind.
Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) as a key principle in the new Africa strategy

The new Africa strategy, presented as a reflection of mutual interests and responsibilities between Africa and the EU, does not go far enough. It focuses exclusively on the points within the African Agenda 2063 that are compatible with and relevant to the EU’s own strategic priorities. Critically, it fails to show policy coherence, that is, to address the negative impact of EU actors on Africa. We thus ask the EU leadership to respect the PCD principle by adopting an strategy that incorporates a deep critical self-reflection on the EU side and that foresees means to address the negative spill-over of the EU’s internal and external policies on Africa.

Civil society participation as means to ensure a new Africa strategy that effectively reduces inequalities

So that the new strategy can truly respond to and address the needs, interests, and aspirations of European and African residents, consultations must include not only the views of continental political and economic elites but also those of civil society and marginalised groups. Meaningful grassroots participation is crucial to ensure this strategy can succeed in leaving no one behind. We thus ask for the EU to finalise and implement the new Africa strategy in a truly democratic and inclusive manner by considering all African priorities (not only those compatible with and relevant to the EU’s own strategic priorities) and by enabling civil society participation.

Private sector engagement as a tool for human development that leaves no one behind

In line with recent trends, the proposed Africa strategy expresses overstated confidence in economic growth and private sector engagement as vehicles for inclusive and sustainable economic growth. In and of themselves, neither can guarantee poverty eradication or social inclusion. Rather, they can exacerbate inequalities if strong public regulatory frameworks enforcing the “do no harm” principle and redistributive policies mitigating inequalities are not in place. We thus urge EU leaders to recognise the limitations of the current model of economic growth, acknowledge the inherent risks of involving the private sector when promoting the public interest, and foresee strong regulation mechanisms to ensure private investments are publicly accountable and serve local markets and actors.

Enabling human development via increased aid and support to domestic resource mobilisation

Objectives linked to the fight against poverty and exclusion, such as job creation, reduction of illicit financial flows, education and healthcare investments need to be backed by concrete actions. We thus ask the EU to prioritise significant investments in human development in EU-Africa relations: to strengthen social protection, and ensure universal access to affordable and adequate public services and to decent well-remunerated jobs and skills training.

The new strategy must also incorporate additional measures to help African countries increase their financial resources and domestic resource mobilisation such as: to fulfil ODA commitments, facilitate remittances transactions, promote tax transparency, adopt legislation for mandatory tax transparency for multinational companies in the EU, and revise tax treaties with African countries.
A migration and mobility partnership based on principles of solidarity, shared responsibility, and respect for human rights and international and refugee law

While the EC and EEAS recognise the interconnections between migration and development and commit to uphold the principles of solidarity and shared responsibility with their African partners, their proposed solutions and actions fall short of these aspirations. There is no clear break from previous strategies and actions, which have mainly reflected EU interests namely the prevention of irregular migration, at the expense of African priorities such as visa facilitation and more safe and legal migration channels. We thus call on EU leaders to ensure that the partnership on migration and mobility is truly grounded in the principles of solidarity, shared responsibility, and respect for human rights and international and refugee law, and reflects a legitimate balance of interests on both European and African sides.

Active citizenship and a human rights-based approach to peace-building

Civil society is seen in the strategy as an important peace-building actor, but does not propose concrete actions to reinforce civil society organisations and human rights defenders. The joint communication overlooks the EU’s own structural role in creating and perpetuating conflict in African regions. We thus recommend the EU to support African efforts to foster peace and security through a human rights-based approach and civil society involvement. This includes supporting African countries in addressing the root drivers of conflict, increasing investments in quality and universal education as a means to strengthen active citizenship, and involving local and grassroots communities in the policy process with a particular focus on women and girls.

EU-Africa partnership that protects human rights and democratic values over strategic interests

Caritas welcomes the strategy’s renewed commitment to promoting peace, security, good governance, the rule of law and human rights. However, it also warns that these aspirations may conflict with other EU strategic interests in practice. As the new strategy is finalised, we ask the EU to address contradictions by prioritising democratic and human rights values in international development cooperation with third countries. In particular, we urge EU Member States to be coherent in their support to the AU-led ‘Silencing the Guns’ campaign by committing to reduce their arms exports to Africa. We also call for the European Commission to foresee sanctions on EU Member States that break the rules regarding arms sales.

An ambitious green transition that duly incorporates questions of social justice

The joint communication rightly emphasises the need to take strong action against climate change and environmental degradation. Regrettably, the priorities set in the joint communication are unlikely to bring about the needed transformation due to lack of ambition and sense of urgency. We thus urge the EU to promote a wide range of ambitious systemic changes in energy generation and consumption, in line with a wider and more transformative understanding of the 2030 Agenda. To ensure the transition is not only ‘green’ but also ‘just’, the new Africa strategy needs to integrate social justice concerns and the needs and interest of local communities. Envisaged actions should include support to small-scale farmers, particularly women, and mitigation of spill-over effects, particularly when they concern the poorer and more vulnerable groups.

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