

Demographic growth, youth and employment will be at the centre of discussions at the 5th Africa-European Union Summit taking place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, on the 29th and 30th of November 2017.

By 2050, Africa's population is projected to reach about 2.4 billion of predominantly young people¹, born in this millennium and whose activities are guided by the use of science, technology, information and innovation.

Creating opportunities today for these young people is absolutely crucial as they will be the drivers of the economic development and social change of tomorrow. In addition to the existing huge imbalance between the numbers of African youths entering the labour force every year and the number of jobs being created, there are also inadequacies between the skills and competences acquired by young people in higher education and vocational education and training and those required for their professional life.

Recalling the Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Agenda 2030, the **African Union's Agenda 2063** calls for an education and skills revolution alongside the creation of new job opportunities with the development of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25). CESA 16-25 proposes paradigm shifts that will greatly enhance quality of education, strengthen links with industry and promote the production of innovators and entrepreneurs, which are all necessary requirements for job seekers in all areas. Agenda 2063 also supports the establishment and reinforcement of a **democratic space** that allows young people to participate and voice their opinion. The EU is Africa's longstanding partner in the area of education, from early childhood and primary to higher education, including vocational education training and adult learning as well as in scientific research and innovation.

The participants at the Structural Dialogue acknowledge the need to reinforce the linkages between the competences and skills acquired through higher education and those necessary for work. Establishing quality professional programmes must however not be at the expense of fundamental education and research which remain the core missions of the University and must be maintained and developed to ensure the sustainability of professional training adapted to the evolution of the labour market and society's needs.

Higher education and vocational education and training must be more relevant, respond to the needs of the labour market, linked to social and industrial development, more innovative, of better quality and more accessible. Participants also underline the importance of skills and competences that are linked to employment and entrepreneurship and the importance of training that can contribute to local development.

The participants of this dialogue agreed that:

- Those African Union Member States who have not yet done so are called to ratify the revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States adopted at Addis Ababa on 12 December 2014. Member states, universities, higher education and research institutions as well as development partners are called to support implementation of the regionalisation of education, research and innovation in Africa, including by the training of students through mobility opportunities in Africa;
- The African Union should strengthen its efforts on the adoption of a common African Union passport which will facilitate acquisition of visas for students' mobility;

¹ United Nations, World population prospects, 2015



- Governments are asked to contribute to the implementation of effective and efficient mobility programmes and the African Union should create a common on-line platform for sharing information on available mobility;
- Alumni have an important role to play in higher education on the continent and through a performing structure could be a technical arm for the implementation of Africa-EU policies;
- A mapping of graduates should be undertaken, as well as a graduate impact survey of the degrees in relation to socio-economic development, and programmes supporting the return of skilled graduates to their country of origin such as "returning expert schemes", are also necessary to retain critical skills;
- The establishment of a Pan African Association of Alumni, bringing together all the students and alumni of Erasmus+, the intra-Africa mobility programmes and the "Tuning Africa" initiative would support a wider dissemination of networks which can actively contribute to improving the relevance of programmes to the labour market, the development of multidisciplinary programmes, the evaluation of the quality of education and capacity building;
- More emphasis should be given to the inclusion of people with disabilities, minorities and the African Union should reinforce the importance of language and accessibility for integration and promotion of unity among Member states;
- The African Union and its Member states should work to ensure the relevance and quality of degree programmes, on the basis of good practices such as "Africa Quality Rating Mechanism" and "Tuning Africa";
- Linking the education system to communities has a latent potential for innovation which will have a multipronged benefit of serving local communities', creating job opportunities and nurturing innovative ideas that could be replicated and scaled-up in other settings;
- Community-based innovations in education and technology which take into account local specific needs and cultures and integrate African knowledge and practices should be developed and include people who have not benefitted from formal education and training. It is also necessary to reinforce the capacity of teachers, establish innovation clubs as satellites to primary, secondary and high-level institutions, developed second-chance schools and follow-up programmes teaching entrepreneurship and offering career inspiration and guidance;
- The African Union and its Member states should valorise the participation of young people in the political, social, economic and security developments of the continent, associate young people into decision making processes and consider their aspirations in the conception and realization of concrete projects.

Building on the momentum initiated by the EU Joint Communication and the preparations of the Africa-European Union Summit, this **structured dialogue** allowed students, alumni, academics, associations and professionals to debate about development of processes to make learning programmes more relevant for their school-to-work transition and the crucial role of students, alumni and young people for their participation in these processes. The acquisition of transversal competences, including entrepreneurial and team work-related skills are highly needed for the development of innovative knowledge-based economies and participative democracies.

The participants consider themselves as stakeholders in the development of initiatives aiming to support the enhancement of knowledge and skills in the framework of the Africa-EU Partnership and call upon Heads of State to support this process.

Abidjan, 16-17 October 2017
