



Africa-Europe Conference on  
Higher Education Collaboration

# EVENT REPORT

Brussels | 25 October 2019

"INVESTING IN PEOPLE,  
BY INVESTING IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION AND SKILLS  
IN AFRICA"

ORGANISED BY



THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP  
LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE





Around 400 participants took part in the Africa-Europe conference on higher education collaboration on 25 October 2019 in Brussels at the Charlemagne building.

## Introduction

*The organisation of this conference is a strong symbol from all parties to further strengthening European-African collaboration in higher education.*

Jointly organised by the **European Commission**, the **African Union Commission** and four higher education stakeholder organisations of EU member states - the **DAAD**, the **British Council**, **Campus France** and **Nuffic** - this high-level conference highlighted the importance of collaboration in higher education between the two continents.

The event provided **sector-specific recommendations** on how to further develop the chapter 'Investing in people by investing in education and skills' of the **Africa-Europe Alliance**. One central demand of the conference participants is that higher education and skills will feature prominently in the 6th Africa-EU summit, which is due to take place in 2020 in Europe.

## Background

*Education features highly in Africa's Agenda 2063.*

The [Agenda 2063](#) is Africa's continental strategic framework to achieve inclusive and sustainable development through "well educated citizens and skills revolution underpinned by science, technology and innovation". This goal is supported by the AU's [Continental Education Strategy for Africa](#) (CESA) that aims, among others, to "revitalize and expand tertiary education, research and innovation to address continental challenges and promote global competitiveness".

Africa is a dynamic and young continent and a long-standing partner of the European Union. In September 2018, the President of the European Commission announced an ambitious "[Africa-Europe Alliance](#)" to deepen the EU's economic and trade relationship with Africa through investment and job creation.

*Investing in skills and the young generation has been identified - both at AU and EU level - as key for sustainable social and economic development.*

Africa and Europe have been working together to develop high quality and inclusive higher education systems, exchange experience in matching skills with the demand of the labour market and to support collaboration and exchange between students and scientists within and between the European and African continents.



## Key Conference Facts

- Considering the predominantly **young population in Africa**, education and skills need to be placed at the forefront of an Africa-EU partnership aimed at building a prosperous, safe and sustainable world.
- Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping the **two continents' future**, by providing prospects to young people, educating the leaders of tomorrow and supporting economic and social development.
- Europe and Africa face **comparable challenges** in the field of higher education: quality, providing study courses relevant to the labour market, the role of higher and vocational learning in developing knowledge and skills, mobility and international partnerships, staff development and creating an inclusive and accessible higher education system for all.
- **Sharing good practices** in Africa-Europe higher education collaboration is key. Discussing the challenges and opportunities that stem from higher education represented a crucial part of the conference, as well as the poster session that has presented a **wide range of initiatives** implemented by African and European partners.

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## Opening Session

The conference was opened by a keynote speech from an academic – diving right into the topic, to which policy makers had the possibility to respond.

Prof. Matos highlighted the impact of higher education in society and stressed the **current window of opportunity for Africa**, noting the spread of democracy over the continent and the positive influence of the Africa Union. He also pointed to a **shift in focus away from development aid towards trade and investment**.



*Prof. Narciso Matos, Vice-Chancellor, Poly-technical University of Mozambique*

However, he also outlined the challenges Africa is currently facing: An explosion in enrolment has placed **pressure on institutional resources**, while access to tertiary education remains limited. Additionally, the **rate of unemployment**, which forces people to work in the informal sector, is another key challenge according to him.

*“If Africa is not producing Masters and PhD candidates, then it is not producing research.”*

Prof. Matos recommended a **greater investment in graduate training** as it has a multiplying effect. He also called for **more support for academic networks**, to strengthen existing schemes and he encouraged more cooperation between African and European universities.

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Prof. Anyang Agbor emphasised the role quality higher education plays in economic development and the retention of human capital. She stressed that these are critical to achieve the **African Union's vision of an integrated and prosperous Africa**, driven by its own citizens.



*Prof. Sarah Mbi Enow Anyang Agbor, Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology, African Union Commission*

She presented the African Union's Agenda 2063, which constitutes a blueprint for transforming Africa into a **global powerhouse of the future**. One aim is to have 70 percent of high school graduates able to go on to tertiary education.

*"Africa must invest in quality education and research in order to face the future with confidence."*

Prof. Agbor also highlighted the need to build research capacity, and for **high quality post-graduate programmes** to be linked to regional and national development visions. Access to technology would be a key pathway here. The role of the African Union should be to articulate a common vision, and to monitor and promote initiatives.

*"Partnerships will help higher education in Africa to move to the next level."*

She called for **more collaborative programmes with the EU**, which can support the development of harmonised quality assurance schemes, accreditation systems and the strengthening of institutional cooperation to encourage academic mobility.

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Dr. Dorothea Rüländ emphasised that investing in higher education is not just about improving the prospects of young people; it is also about **educating the leaders of tomorrow**, as well as experts who will deliver sustainable social and economic growth. She stressed that quality education is a multiplier and should be at the top of the agenda.

*“I hope to see a significant boost in this form of cooperation with the African continent.”*



*Dr. Dorothea Rüländ, Secretary General, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)*

She outlined that the four organisations – the DAAD, the British Council, Campus France and Nuffic – have a long history of cooperation with the African continent, and that all agree on the key importance of higher education collaboration for both Africa and Europe.

*“Quality higher education creates innovation and innovators, as well as new jobs and knowledge. It cultivates development and change and helps to avoid societal blockages. It should be at the top of the agenda.”*

She encouraged to seek **synergies** by what is being done on **EU and AU level**, as well as by EU member states and African Union **member states**.

The DAAD, the British Council and Nuffic also implement the Erasmus+ programme in their respective countries. She welcomed the fact that **Erasmus+** supports mobility and international partnerships, and can make use of established networks. She declared that she hopes to see a boost in cooperation with the African continent in this programme.

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Koen Doens emphasised the important role of education, which is expressed not just through human capital, but also through shaping the way of thinking. Regarding the relationship between the EU and Africa he said **a partnership can only work if it is a two-way street**.



*Koen Doens, Director General, Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development, European Commission*

*“How to develop quality education that responds to tomorrow’s opportunities?  
This is a challenge for all to address.”*

He also underlined the progress that has already been made and that Africa is advancing in fields such as digitalisation. Furthermore, he referred to the “Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs”, of which one of the four key pillars is about investing in people by investing in education and skills. Concerning the new Erasmus programme, he said that he is optimistic about an increased focus on Africa in the next programme phase, due to start in 2021.



[To the webstream of the opening session](#)

## Workshops

### Thematic Session I

#### Workshop A: “Higher Education Institutions as job generators – matching skills with labour market requirements”

The number of young people aged 18 to 23 in Africa will increase from 141 million in 2017 to 196 million in 2030. There were 15 million African students in 2017, this figure is predicted to double by 2030. Their professional integration is a key issue at the heart of national policy priorities of African countries and their partners.

- Ensure that **cooperation with the private sector** is an **integral part of Higher Education Institutions’ strategy** and vision and take into account in particular sustainability and gender.

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#### Workshop B: “Supporting refugees’ and IDPs’ access to higher education”

It is estimated that less than 3% of refugees have access to tertiary education, compared to 37% of their peers elsewhere. Tertiary education, however, gives young refugees the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills that will allow them to contribute to society and that are essential for post-conflict recovery and rebuilding.

- **Long-term multi-stakeholder investments** in the higher education systems of the respective host region (e.g. extra study places, additional staff) as well as in individual funding possibilities for refugees and IDPs (e.g. high-quality scholarship programmes & digital learning opportunities) are required to increase the number of refugees and IDPs accessing HE.

- ➔ **Instruments need to be flexible and dynamic**, assure refugee protection, social cohesion, inclusion and take a comprehensive approach across the entire educational pathway leading into decent work for all.
- ➔ **Comparable support schemes** to those made available by the European Commission for Syrian refugees, should be made available to refugee situations in Africa, including protracted refugee situations.

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### **Workshop C: “Capacity building and curriculum development through international partnerships and innovations”**

Youthful populations without access to Higher Education will be a generational loss. Africa needs students with skills for competitiveness, the ability to innovate, and student entrepreneurs who can be job creators. Academic capacity building through international partnerships, whether regional or global, has the potential to provide these benefits.

- ➔ Facilitate **transnational education partnerships** between European and African universities that:
  - provide an enabling environment for **mobility**
  - are based on **reciprocity** which are proven to **boost engagement and research output** among academics
  - and provide **better learning experiences** which instill graduates with the skills that will result in improved life chances.

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## Thematic Session II

### Workshop D: “Quality assurance and relevance of study programmes”

Relevant and high-quality study programmes cater to the increased focus on employability and can be locally, regionally or globally competitive. Harmonised systems allow for enhanced trust, the recognition of degrees and qualifications and hence for the mobility of trained individuals across the continent.

- Streamline and further promote the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF) and implementation of its instruments at all levels and involving key stakeholders.

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### Workshop E: “Building skills and capacity in the next generation of university staff”

Increasing numbers of students in Africa have access to Higher Education (HE) with a growth rates of over 50% across the region. However, the numbers progressing to PhD can be as low as 2% of undergraduate students. As a result, Staff Student Ratios have risen to over 45:1 in several HE sectors, which also makes the workload in the sector less attractive to new graduates.

- Support the development of the next generation of high-quality academic and institution leaders by **facilitating access to practice-based Continual Professional Development** in the workplace,
- purposeful **investment in teaching resources**,
- stronger **collaboration with industry**,
- stronger **pedagogic skills development**,
- making use of **inter-regional and international partnerships** to gain knowledge and exposure to new approaches.

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### Workshop F: “The role of HE and TVET in developing knowledge and skills – the case of agri-food transformation”

Higher education and TVET contribute to value addition in agri-food systems through knowledge and training input and dissemination of innovations. Agri-food transformation requires integrated and collaborative learning since many stakeholders work along value chains with different capabilities and skills requirements.

- ➔ **Improved linkages between universities and vocational training institutes** to address the needs of the agricultural sector in a comprehensive way aligning the different skills, education and research programmes
- ➔ African universities require **capacity development** on how to involve the food industry in education and research; **teachers and lectures** in agriculture **should also be exposed to private sector needs** to enhance graduate employability and entrepreneurship.
- ➔ **Strengthening the agri-food sector** also has a clear positive impact on social development indicators and climate change.

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## Keynote Speech and Introduction to the Poster Session

Noureddine Manamanni, Director of External and Institutional Relations Department at Campus France, gave a keynote speech on the topic "More synergies, more coherence, more 'bridge-building'."

*"The global student population increased by 43% between 2007 and 2017 while academic mobility and access to higher education have developed. The Africa student population (15 million in 2017) should more than double by 2030."*

He recalled the importance for both Europe and Africa to unite behind common perspectives and objectives of cooperation, gave examples of successful projects and partnerships and proposed some lines of reflection for future collaboration between the two continents.

*"I welcome the strong commitment to higher education shown by the EU and the AU."*

Prof. Manamanni concluded by introducing the poster session to the audience, which displayed **46 posters from 40 organisations**.

An overview of all posters can be found [here](#).





## Closing Session

Moderator Freddy Weima, Director-General of Nuffic, introduced the Closing Policy Panel by underlining the overwhelming atmosphere and enthusiasm of conference participants:

*“There is a clear eagerness to share knowledge – a professional learning community in Europe and Africa around higher education is being developed.”*

*Marjeta Jager, Deputy Director General, Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development, European Commission*



Marjeta Jager emphasised that the European Commission was proud to have co-organised this event with its partners and welcomed the workshop recommendations. She indicated that these will feed into the policy process.

*“I would like to declare this conference a success. Let’s invest together in people, in our future and in the Africa-Europe partnership.”*

By summarising the key lessons, which included supporting quality teaching through lifelong learning and the inclusion of modern technologies into the curriculum, she also referred to good examples of collaboration, such as **Erasmus+** capacity building projects. Regarding the future Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027), she underlined the European Commission’s intention to **strengthen the cooperation with Africa**.

She recalled that **higher education** and **TVET** have long been **priorities for the EU**. According to her, new ways of attracting the interest of young people must be found to achieve this. Jager also stressed the need for a comprehensive approach to higher education that combines institutional partnerships and policy frameworks, and that links **education** and the **private sector**.

*“Higher education systems need to be more relevant to needs of the labour market and more closely linked to the social and industrial development.”*



*Prof. Sarah Mbi Enow Anyang Agbor, Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology, African Union Commission*

Prof. Agbor welcomed the focus on higher education and skills in Africa and stressed that investing in education means investing in people. She also drew attention to the **diversity of the conference participants from both Europe and Africa as well as from different sectors** participating the conference and noted that the important topics, discussed at the six workshops, are all themes that the AU is working on.

*“This event is a very important forum to raise awareness on higher education development in Africa and synergies between ongoing initiatives.”*

She welcomed the workshop recommendations and highlighted the importance of **facilitating mobility, qualification frameworks** and **TVET** in developing practical knowledge for the labour market. She also indicated that she would bring up the recommendations at the next meeting of AU Ministers of Education.

*“The AU’s Agenda 2063 provides a blueprint to transform Africa into a global powerhouse of the future. It demands that Africa invests in education, skills, science, technology and innovation. One of the pillars is dedicate to the need for investing in the people of Africa, the continent’s most precious resource.”*

Prof. Agbor introduced the **Pan-African University**, a post-graduate training and research network of university nodes in five regions supported by the AU that is designed to address specific African challenges.

She concluded her closing statement by welcoming the participants to Africa:

*“It would be an honour if this dialogue can be hosted at the African Union Commission next year.”*

*Prof Dr Mohamed El-Shinawi, Adviser to the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Egypt – Egypt is currently chairing the African Union presidency*



Prof. Mohamed El-Shinawi hoped there would be a **second conference** to build on the success of this event. He stressed that cooperation meant that Africa needs to know its own priorities.

He emphasised the need of **investments in data** and reminded that Africa is a very young continent with 40 % of its population below 15 years.

*“We need to teach our young generation to produce knowledge. They have to be more involved in our discussions, we need to learn more about their needs.”*

According to him, other key issues to consider include **gender balance**, **e-learning** and **two-way cooperation** between universities and industry. While mentioning the challenges, he offered to share the lessons from **Egypt Vision 2030** with other nations.

In his reference to the Africa-Europe partnership, he said that a lot is expected from European partners. He called for the development of further cooperation programmes, adapted to the needs of today and tomorrow, such as the **Erasmus+** programme.

He stressed the importance cooperation:

*“If you want to go far, we have to go all of us together.”*

*Susanne Madders, Senior Civil Servant for the Co-operation with Developing and Emerging Countries, Africa and Middle East, Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany*



Susanne Madders welcomed the African perspective on higher education, brought forward during the conference.

*“There is a partnership of equals.”*

She called for more discussion on **distance learning**, and for the **research community to seek synergies and come together with the higher education community**. She pointed out the importance of a balanced relation between teaching and research tasks of university staff, being a dialectic process.

She welcomed the recommendations of this event at the implementation level and outlined that these will help in the implementation of political strategies, like the **Compact with Africa** initiated under the **German G20 Presidency**.

*“We as a ministry at the strategic level can learn from this conference, which represents the implementation level. It is a kind of dialect process!”*

One focus of the Ministry’s Africa Strategy is the **knowledge transfer and innovation** to foster the knowledge triangle of research, education and industry. Bringing these elements together could be a starting point for further cooperation with Africa. She said that more **synergies** should be particularly created between vocational education institutions and universities.





*“I think it would have been good to get a voice from business and industry as well.”*

*“The most important takeaway is to see how the international education organisations work together. Seeing the DAAD, Nuffic, Campus France and the British Council working together, building such a network and presenting that – I was very delighted about that.”*

## Wrap-up video about the conference

[To the video on YouTube](#)

All Conference Outcomes are available on the [EVENT PAGE](#).





**This report was produced on behalf of the event organising committee by the DAAD Brussels office:**

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