

Universities and research organisations across Africa and Europe call for a new framework for cooperation

In a joint effort to foster equitable research partnerships and realise the sustainable development of Africa and Europe, universities and research organisations from all parts of Africa and Europe urge the African Union and the European Union to embrace a comprehensive, long-term vision for the Global Gateway's AU-EU Innovation Agenda and pilot an integrated Africa-EU Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) Programme for the period 2023-2027.

The ambition to accelerate Africa's transition to an innovation-led, research-based, and knowledge-based economy requires a novel approach to science cooperation between Africa and Europe, grounded on sustainability, excellence, capacity-building, and scalability. As the Research Ministers of the two Unions will meet on 13 June 2023 to adopt the final version of the AU-EU Innovation Agenda, we need an innovative funding instrument to strengthen long-term research cooperation between Africa and Europe.

The call is supported by organisations representing around 2,000 universities across Africa, Europe and beyond as well as research organisations. Building on past successes and experiences, we propose an Africa-EU STI Programme targeting the individual and institutional levels, while addressing at the same time the need to develop research and innovation infrastructures in Africa. To strengthen the research ecosystem as a whole, this new instrument must support individual talents in synergies with the wider research ecosystem, boost African universities and research organisations' institutional capacities, and steer the development of world-class research infrastructures.

- 1) Building on the success of ARISE to support excellent African researchers:** The Africa-EU STI Programme should integrate and expand upon the achievements of the African Research Initiative for Scientific Excellence (ARISE) Pilot Programme. We must ensure a continuation to ARISE, integrating it in the broader research ecosystem. In the mid-term, we request the creation of funding schemes for mid-career and senior researchers, to ensure career progression in Africa and foster brain circulation.
- 2) Establishing AU-EU Centres of Excellence to champion new types of institutional partnerships with a transformative potential:** The Africa-EU STI Programme must support the creation of AU-EU Centres of Excellence. Building on our collective experiences, we underline the need for AU-EU Centres of Excellence to boost the institutional capacities of universities and research organisations across Africa and Europe to perform excellent collaborative research, develop joint training programmes, foster mobility, enhance the policy and socio-economic impact of research, and frame investments in research infrastructures. To be truly transformative and sustainable, it is critical that any funding is awarded through an open competition based on research excellence, long-term vision, capacity-building, and inclusiveness.
- 3) Developing research and innovation infrastructures to boost the impact and the sustainability of cooperation:** Developing research infrastructure is crucial for Africa-Europe cooperation, as the investment gap hampers scientific progress and reinforces Africa's dependence to the Global North. The Africa-EU STI Programme should coordinate joint efforts and long-term commitment from the AU and the EU, in partnership with African and European governments. It should also enable the establishment of a coordination platform between the main public funders of research and innovation and African governments, to avoid duplication of initiatives and make a greater impact on the continents.

To strengthen our message to policymakers and signal our willingness to engage with a new Africa-EU Science, Technology and Innovation Programme, this call is open for further stakeholders, universities, and other research organisations to sign. Please contact Laura Royer at laura.royer@the-guild.eu.

Jan Palmowski, Secretary-General of The Guild said: *“The AU’s Africa 2063 strategy and the EU’s Global Gateway both put knowledge at the heart of their vision. Through the Africa-EU STI Programme we can make a transformative beginning, ensuring that we invest in excellent research, long-term collaboration, and sustainable research infrastructure. The unity of the research community assembled in this call underlines: we are ready to play our part in strengthening the AU-EU strategic partnership; we call on policy-makers to support us in this endeavour.”*

Ernest Aryeetey, Secretary-General of ARUA said: *“ARUA and The Guild are working together to promote the development of strong collaboration between African and European researchers, in pursuit of the strategies outlined for AU-EU cooperation. The Africa-EU Science, Technology, and Innovation Programme has the potential to support the transformation of science in Africa and a better understanding of Africa in Europe.”*