



# Event report #6

## 2025: Renewed framework for Africa-Europe Cultural Relations

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On 11 April 2025, culture Solutions' Chair, Elise Cuny, joined Sylvia Amann's Deconfining Online Coffee Chat<sup>1</sup> to present initial findings from the joint research initiative by culture Solutions and the South African Cultural Observatory (SACO), funded by the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF): "Skills Foresight: The Creative Economy and the Untapped Potential of Cultural Cooperation for Africa-Europe Youth". Ahead of the release of two research reports looking at the policy framework for Africa-Europe Cultural Relations and future skills required by young creatives in South Africa to thrive in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), the webinar was a useful opportunity to bring together around twenty cultural professionals, policymakers, and researchers to reflect on key questions:

- How does the concept of cultural ecosystems reflect the renewed dynamics in Africa-Europe cultural cooperation?
- What are the essential ingredients for building strong and sustainable cultural ecosystems?
- How can Africa-Europe policy framework contribute to strengthening them?

SACO's colleagues Amy Shelver (currently with the UN Human Rights Innovation Hub and an Associate Researcher at SACO), Avril Joffe (Chair of Entrepreneurship and Cultural Policy, UNESCO) and Joseph Gaylard (Independent, former Head of Pro Helvetia Johannesburg, Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia) contributed to the discussion.

1. Event part of the Project Deconfining Arts, Cultures and Policies in Africa & Europe co-funded by the EU, <https://deconfining.eu/>

## New policy framework

### Maintaining culture on the agenda

The **7th European Union-African Union (EU-AU) summit** will take place in the second half of 2025. On 21 May 2025, EU and AU Foreign ministers meet in Brussels for the third time to review progress since the 6th EU-AU Summit held in February 2022, during which the shared commitment to foster an environment conducive to cultural exchange between peoples was affirmed.<sup>2</sup> **Where do cultural relations stand now?** How can we ensure that the EU-AU summit and the broader policy framework grasp the importance, challenges and opportunities of the cultural sector for the continents and for the partnership?

The Deconfining coffee chat underscored the urgent need to safeguard **independent spaces for dialogue** among African and European cultural professionals—especially during a time marked by the restructuration of programmes, cuts in cultural budgets<sup>3</sup> and the questioning of the value and direction of international cooperation.<sup>4</sup>

The connections among artists, cultural institutions, and civil societies between the two continents often transcend rigid policy and funding frameworks. In periods of uncertainty, it is the presence of long-established and trusted actors that provides **stability** and **direction**. These actors can serve as a compass, helping to maintain focus on the core values of fair, inclusive, and sustainable cultural cooperation.

The importance of **people-to-people cultural relations** and spaces for cultural exchanges between and across the continents should be reaffirmed in 2025 when nationalism, identity politics and the use of force are increasingly dominating contemporary international relations.

### AU and EU actorness

The culture Solutions and SACO research project for the AEF integrates an **institutional perspective**, with particular attention given to the internal functioning of the European Union and African Union and their perception by cultural actors. Although culture remains a member states' prerogative, the institutions' strategies for cultural cooperation should not be seen merely as the sum of their member states, but as organisations with their own agendas, timeframes and internal logics.

Understanding how they function is key to effectively informing policy and ensuring that decisions are grounded in the realities of cultural practice. Alongside this, the research aims to highlight the realities that often go unnoticed within formal policy frameworks. **Perception-based interviews** revealed a strong **expectation** for both the AU and EU to enhance their roles and assert their presence in the cultural field.

Cultural professionals interviewed for the research refer to **cross-continental solidarity**. Tangible connections already exist between African and European cultural sectors, built through collaborations, networks and long-

2. 6th European Union - African Union Summit, Final Declaration, A Joint Vision for 2030, 2022.

3. Artists at Risk, German Federal Budget Cuts Threaten to Halve Funding for Independent Art, 28 August 2024.

Zayas, C., Cuny, E., cS internal dialogue #1: Democracy, elections and international cultural relations after 2024, 19 December 2024, culture Solutions, <https://www.culturesolutions.eu/articles/democracy-elections-and-international-cultural-relations-after-2024/>.

4. Chase-Lubitz, J., Europe's development leaders call for rethink on aid and partnerships, Devez, 13 May 2025, <https://www.devez.com/news/europe-s-development-leaders-call-for-rethink-on-aid-and-partnerships-110054>

standing professional relationships, impulsed from previous Africa-Europe cultural programmes.<sup>5</sup> These connections thus need to be reinforced by a supportive and coherent policy framework, fostering continuity. AU and EU have a role to play to sustain and nurture these links as budgetary instruments and institutional priorities evolve.

If the AU and EU aim to meet their societal and sustainable development objectives, continued and strengthened support for civil society and the cultural sector is needed. As CCIs gain interest from investors, knowledge and understanding of cultural long established cultural actors will be central in navigating ecosystems and cooperation. And when integrating new actors and funding streams for cultural ecosystems, it is essential to keep in mind the long-term goals of **societal benefit**, the protection of **cultural value**, and support for **youth** in building sustainable careers.

## Emerging models for cultural cooperation

### New fundings

The EU is entering a **new phase of cultural cooperation programmes with Africa**, marked by the conclusion of the ACP-EU programme in 2026<sup>6</sup>, the launch of the new

Africa-Europe Partnerships for Culture programme<sup>7</sup> from the European Commission in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the introduction of new funding mechanisms for CCIs focusing on private sector investment's strategies and incentives:

- **CreatiFI**, the EU Cultural and Creative Industries Financing Initiative,<sup>8</sup> is the first dedicated EU programme that uses financial instruments for CCIs in the EU's international cooperation. Launched in 2019, it focuses on building capacities of banks and financial intermediaries to engage with creatives, de-risking investment in CCIs as well as creating an enabling environment;
- **Creafund**<sup>9</sup> was deployed in 2022 with an operational launch in the second half of 2022. Proparco, the French development bank, is leading it as part of the CreatiFI initiative. The financial support of the EU for Creafund was announced to be up to 6.47 million EUR, with an expected leverage effect of more than 20 million EUR in private finance.

These shifts signal a new phase in cultural relations, where strategic, flexible, and inclusive frameworks will be promoted. Cultural and financial actors should however be accompanied in this **transition**.

5. For example, the Programme de soutien aux initiatives culturelles décentralisées (PSIC), from 2006 to 2014 and renewed in Benin—has had a lasting and significant impact on the country's cultural sector. Its influence is still evident today in the improved quality and professionalism of cultural projects.

6. ACP-EU Culture Programme. 2021. Supporting the ACP Cultural and Creative Sectors. April 29, 2021, <https://www.acp-ue-culture.eu/en/support-for-the-cultural-creative-sectors-in-acp-countries/>.

7. EUNIC, EUNIC to Lead Part of New Africa-Europe Programme in Sub-Saharan Africa, 6 January 2021, <https://eunic.eu/news/new-africa-europe-programme-in-sub-saharan-africa> (last accessed March 11, 2025).

8. European Commission. InfoPoint Conference: CreatiFI - The Cultural and Creative Industries Financing Initiative. 21 February 2024, [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/events/infopoint-conference-creatifi-cultural-and-creative-industries-financing-initiative-2024-02-21\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/events/infopoint-conference-creatifi-cultural-and-creative-industries-financing-initiative-2024-02-21_en) (last accessed March 11, 2025).

9. CREA Fund: Proparco soutient, avec l'appui de l'UE, le financement des industries culturelles et créatives en Afrique. 15 February 2022, <https://www.proparco.fr/fr/actualites/crea-fund-proparco-soutient-avec-lappui-de-lue-le-financement-des-industries-culturelles> (last accessed March 11, 2025).

## New model of cultural growth

The terms **cultural ecosystems** and **cultural entrepreneurs** are characteristic of a new model of **cultural growth** that is beginning to take shape. We are operating within an economic paradigm driven by **innovation**, shifting the business model in the CCIs and reinforced by a setback in public funding and a rise of private investment.

The revised UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (FCS)—a draft of which was released in early 2025—defines a cultural ecosystem as “a complex environment wherein artists, social groups, cultural communities, audiences, and a broad spectrum of public and private intermediaries engage in various relationships to generate diverse forms of cultural and economic value.”<sup>10</sup>

The concept is not new. As early as 2018, the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) expert group of the European Commission had already established a link between cultural ecosystems and both **innovation** and **entrepreneurship**.<sup>11</sup> Their findings highlighted how the presence of such ecosystems can foster innovation in the cultural and creative sectors, and emphasised the crucial role of support structures—organisations, policies, and institutions that ensure innovation and business development remain sensitive to the specificity and integrity of cultural content.

To ground this discussion in practice, we posed several questions to the audience: Have you observed the concept of a cultural ecosystem in your own environment? How would you describe the

ecosystem in your own environment? How would you describe the ecosystem you are part of? Do you see it as a driver of innovation and new business opportunities?

It became clear from the discussion with webinar participants that the term cultural ecosystems often feels less tangible to practitioners working on the ground than to those involved in policy design—highlighting a potential **disconnect between policy and practice**.

Therefore, as cultural cooperation programmes increasingly target cultural entrepreneurs, it is vital that programme definitions and ambitions are aligned with the **realities** of the sector. There could be a risk in idealising a single model of cultural cooperation, when key factors such as financing, stability, connectivity, and urbanisation significantly shape cultural initiatives. Both the AU and EU should remain open-minded and support a model of cooperation that embraces and enables the expression of **cultural diversity**.

To achieve this, the most effective approach is to build on the work of **existing** actors and networks that have made significant contributions to structuring the sector at national, regional, and inter-regional levels across Africa. The recent agreement signed between the African Union and Music in Africa<sup>12</sup> is a promising example of cooperation between institutions and the cultural sector. This is particularly relevant in a context where CCIs are attracting growing interest for investment, especially through the lens of **technology**. In the AU-EU policy framework, there are more bridges to be

10. UNESCO, Draft revision of the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2025.

11. European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, The role of public policies in developing entrepreneurial and innovation potential of the cultural and creative sectors – Report of THE OMC (Open Method of Coordination) working group of Member States’ experts, Publications Office of the European Union, 2018.

12. Eddie Hatitye, LinkedIn post, February 2025, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/eddie-hatitye-63407146/recent-activity/all/> (last accessed March 11, 2025).



built for CCIs to have a greater place in the **AU-EU innovation agenda**.<sup>13</sup>

In the CCIs, **educational institutions** and **universities** should also be recognised and supported as key guarantors of youth upskilling and the creation of job opportunities.<sup>14</sup>

### New actors, what interest?

New actors are emerging and starting to gain interest in CCIs through **business** and **tech** opportunities. But that growing interest should not mask the specificity of CCIs in creating value beyond economic value: **social value**, defined as “enabling participation in culture and realising creative abilities across all societal sectors” and **cultural value**, defined as “enriching the lives of citizens and communities, by enabling equitable access to cultural forms at the highest levels of artistic quality”.<sup>15</sup>

The policy analysis led by culture Solutions underscores several critical observations. While CCIs are attracting more attention, they are also becoming more **fragile**, challenged by **technological disruptions** such as AI, by the rise of monopolistic tech structures and streaming industries and by the lack of adequate training and structuration of the sector, making it harder to reveal its potential for youth employment and revenues. The usual threats on culture and cultural heritage

remain: risk of instrumentalisation of culture, conflicts and wars, resurgence of nationalism that hampers intercultural dialogue.

### Towards an enabling framework

The AU and EU have an important role to play in promoting a policy framework that enables cultural creation and relations to flourish, while also ensuring the right conditions for the structuring of the sector and protecting it from new forms of **extractivism**<sup>16</sup> that threaten the work of creatives and the integrity of cultural data. This can be achieved through:

- Stronger policy **cooperation** that recognises the specificity of the cultural sector;
- Joint **capacity-building** programmes aimed at developing legal frameworks adapted to the new digital realities of the CCIs<sup>17</sup>;
- Innovative approaches to identifying and supporting skills that can unlock **job creation**.

This framework must be **responsive** to the needs of cultural actors, allowing them to fully benefit from international cooperation and access programmes that reflect their specific contexts. Culture should not be treated merely as an add-on to broader sectors, but rather recognised as

13. The AU-EU Innovation Agenda was “co-created by the African Union and European Union (...) and launched in July 2023 with 1 billion EUR in backing from European sources, among others, to help researchers and innovators create products, services, businesses and jobs.” Chikumbi, B. New A.U.-E.U. Innovation Agenda puts science diplomacy into practice, Arete News 6 February 2025, <https://www.aretenews.com/science-diplomacy-lifts-off-in-africa/> ; African Union, European Union, The AU-EU Innovation Agenda, A strategic partnership supported by Global Gateway, 19 July 2023 retrieved from [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/ec\\_rtd\\_au-eu-innovation-agenda-final-version.pdf](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-07/ec_rtd_au-eu-innovation-agenda-final-version.pdf).

14. Cuny, E., Helly, D. Sustainable digital creative ecosystems in Africa-Europe relations: the role of universities, culture Solutions, 15 March 2025, <https://www.culturesolutions.eu/articles/sustainable-digital-creative-ecosystems-in-africa-europe-relations/>.

15. Ericsson, B., Hauge, A., & Alnes, P. K. Cultural and creative industries: Innovation, performance and spillovers. Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography, 78(4), 2024, 222–233.

16. Interview with Alessandro Jedlowski, Associate professor in African Studies, Sciences Po Bordeaux on 22 October 2024.

17. Africalabs has announced a positive example of “Master Your Intellectual Property Game: Join the EUIPO-AfriLabs Webinar” on 14 May 2025, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/master-your-intellectual-property-game-join-euiipoafrilabs-webinar-fqevf/>.

a **driving force** for both societal progress and economic development. Cultural organisations have often shown their capacity to adapt and support policy frameworks to global challenges (efforts towards sustainable development goals, culture for climate, for democracy, for mental health...). But these connections, all relevant, reach their limit when they fail to recognise culture in itself as essential, and hence to fund it for what it is.

## Sustainable careers for youth employment

### Focus on skills & education

The research develops how policymakers can update cultural cooperation to better meet the sector's needs, while also addressing global demands for **skills, education, and youth employment**.

This calls for a tailored approach for education and skills-building, especially given the rapid development of AI. Important questions emerge from that consideration:

- What should we prioritise in our learning if certain creative or administrative tasks can now be automated?
- What ethical and commercial choices do we face when selecting AI tools—and are we at risk of deepening global imbalances by relying solely on technologies developed outside Africa or Europe?
- How to promote digital skills without hampering creative job opportunities needed for African and European youth?
- How to ensure legal frameworks protecting creatives' work in Africa and Europe?

These are questions that should be on the

agenda of the upcoming EU-AU summit, with pressing relevance for the cultural and creative sector and important insights to hear from cultural actors.

### Foresight analysis for accurate programmes

The webinar was an opportunity for Amy Shelver from SACO to present initial results of a **survey conducted among 47 young South Africans** who benefited from a cultural cooperation initiative/programme funded/supported by a European country as they were under 35.

The survey's results will be crossed with a foresight analysis taking into consideration the changes affecting CCIs and job market in South Africa to derive a series of recommendations of what skills should be supported as part of European-South African cultural cooperation programmes for youth employment.

According to the analysis, 72% of young participants (ages 18–35) reported acquiring **artistic and creative production skills** through their involvement in cultural cooperation activities. These skills included visual arts, performing arts, music production, creative writing, choreography, animation, and game design/development. Additionally, 63% indicated they had developed **entrepreneurial and business skills**, including strategic planning and management, project and operations management, proposal/grant writing, e-commerce, business acumen, and financial literacy.

Despite these gains, over 50% of respondents expressed a strong desire to learn more about entrepreneurial and business skills, as well as **cultural leadership and policy engagement**—including policy research and

development, cultural diplomacy, advocacy and lobbying, and governance in the creative industries.

Finally, the study identifies two major challenges faced by CCIs across Africa:

- **Limited funding and financial sustainability:** 72% of respondents cited a lack of grants, investment opportunities, or long-term financial support for creatives.
- **Unstable income and economic uncertainty:** 86% pointed to the prevalence of project-based work, which makes financial stability difficult to achieve.

### Employment-driven impact assessment

The combination of a survey among South African youth and foresight analysis could serve as inspiration for future programmes.

Overall, cultural actors have expressed their ambition for more **robust impact assessments** of their programmes, recognising that the richness and opportunities emerging from cultural cooperation programmes—for beneficiaries, their communities, and for relations between countries, regions, and continents—are still not fully understood.

The assessment of cultural cooperation should be refined to more accurately reflect the employment potential of CCIs. Evaluations should take a foresight-based approach, identifying the skills and educational curricula necessary to support

job creation and career development. Additionally, impact assessments should measure how funding contributes to employment outcomes.

A useful example is the African Development Bank's report on the fashion industry<sup>18</sup>, which uses Côte d'Ivoire and Ethiopia as case studies to illustrate the sector's potential. Such assessment methods should guide investments to support sustainable models of international cooperation.

These evaluations would also help showcase the essential role of cultural professionals and creatives—often supported by civil society organisations and education stakeholders—who promote solidarity-driven approaches such as peer training and mentoring. These existing **non-formal education and training initiatives** should remain central to international cultural relations programmes and receive continued and enhanced support.

Furthermore, assessing the broader societal and environmental impacts of cultural cooperation would highlight the strategic importance of supporting CCIs as a vital economic sector for **sustainable development**. CCIs and cultural actors have a role to play in building a sustainable economy as well as fostering **political integration** across the African regions. Cultural professionals and artists are seeking regional, inter-regional, and intercontinental **mobility**, bringing to life the vision of an African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) promoted as a flagship project of the Agenda 2063.<sup>20</sup>

18. African Development Bank Group, Report on the Feasibility Study for the Development of the online Fashionomics Platform, Final External Report, AfDB, 2017.

20. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a flagship project of the African Union (2015) Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

## Values and trust: the only way forward

If there is one thing that AU and EU policymakers should be reminded of ahead of the 7th Summit, it is that the pursuit of a **trust-based partnership** must remain a priority, and that this can hardly be done without favouring cultural relations and the recognition of cultural diversity and cultural value. This is essential to ensuring the **stability** needed for the success of any other investments, no matter how important they may be.

The webinar concluded with a critical call to action directed at African stakeholders to engage **proactively**: how can African cultural professionals instigate change within their own institutions to become less dependent, and provoke the necessary shifts at national, regional, and continental levels to address cultural needs **independently**? A true transformation in cultural relations will not happen without this effort and realisation.

The policy report, to be released as part of the SACO-culture Solutions' research project, presents recommendations to AU and EU institutions to increase **visibility**, **coordination**, and **efficiency** in cultural cooperation. It also addresses the need to enhance **impact** assessments, ensure continuity, and establish an agenda for youth engagement in cultural relations.

Finally, it tackles the turning point in the innovation economy, recommending that CCIs be engaged more actively in the **innovation** agenda, while innovation itself must better recognise and embrace the **uniqueness** of the cultural sector.

Without this approach, there is a risk of losing the value of culture in a transition towards a purely business and economically driven logic.

At the end of the day, the main recommendations remain as a reminder to institutions:

- Prioritise **continuity**, especially in successful projects,
- Projects should be better assessed to measure their **full value**—economic, cultural, social, and their long-term impact,
- Avoid reinventing the wheel: always **build on existing actors** and networks. Many solid and well-established structures already exist and should act as primary gatekeepers and coordinators,
- Encourage **independent spaces** for dialogue and discussions between European and African artists to maintain the solidarity established in the past,
- Seek **new allies** and involve **educational** actors, such as art schools and universities, to strengthen cultural ecosystems.





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