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Africa-Europe cultural and creative partnerships: a draft joint strategy

Elise Cuny, Damien Helly, Linda Mbeki

This draft joint strategy for both African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) institutions and member states focuses on the development of their mutual cultural relationship, and their support for the global cultural and creative sectors. In the current context, international cultural relations and the cultural sector are destabilised by rapid technological (AI, increased connectivity) and geopolitical changes (new confronting blocks and alliances). The aim of the strategy is to strengthen ties between African and European societies and their cultural and creative ecosystems, while addressing shared trends and challenges relevant to both partners. Building on the results of a joint research project conducted by culture Solutions and the South African Cultural Observatory¹, it intends to inform and fuel future joint Africa-Europe policy frameworks framing cross-continental relations, and to maintain cultural cooperation and relations as a strategic pillar of the AU-EU partnership. Cultural relations and the creative economy contribute significantly to both continents by driving growth, generating revenue, creating employment, and fostering social cohesion and mutual understanding. Cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are not only shaped by technological innovation but also play a pivotal role in shaping the digital landscapes of the future. Policymakers therefore have a crucial responsibility to ensure that policies and regulations protect —rather than hinder— CCIs, enabling their full potential to be realised.

1. This research was developed with the support of the Africa-Europe Foundation under the AEF Research Facility. The perspectives expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of any affiliated institutions. The brief draws on 36 interviews with artists, cultural professionals, policymakers, and experts from both continents.

1. Context justifying for a new joint Africa-Europe cultural strategy

Stronger political, economic, and cultural ties between Europe and Africa are crucial in a multipolar world.

European Commission Joint Communication
Towards a comprehensive Strategy
with Africa, 2020

In light of a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape, adjustments to strategic priorities and existing frameworks are necessary for both the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU). Rethinking Africa–Europe cultural relations, basing them on a **reciprocal, trust-based, and justice-oriented approach**, will be a prerequisite for making Africa–Europe and AU-EU cultural cooperation fit for the future. It is essential for both partners to be willing to continue working together to jointly defend the diversity of cultural expressions and cultural heritage, and to recognise the central role of cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in sustainable development, youth employment, job creation, and economic growth.

As the 7th AU-EU Summit approaches (24-25 November 2025 in Luanda, Angola), both institutions stand to benefit from a **renewed commitment to shared values and priorities within the CCIs sector**. This might imply a redefinition of the cultural cooperation framework, to include a deeper, shared reflection on what

"cultural relations" between Africa and Europe truly means. This redefinition should be both **conceptual**, clarifying the values and **principles** underpinning cooperation, and practical, building on the exchanges between civil society, cultural professionals, artists, and policymakers. It should also consider geographical and political realities that connect North Africa to Sub-Saharan Africa. This would prove necessary in reimagining a **more integrated and inclusive version of cultural relations**. Such an exercise could take the form of a **joint strategy for Africa-Europe cultural and creative partnerships** that would update that published by the EU in 2016², and that could then be replicated at bilateral level between the EU and African national governments. African and European partners - understood as governments, regional organisations, public and private cultural actors as well as civil societies share a lot.

Some shared topics remain contentious, but the most sensitive issues—colonisation and restitution—are beginning to be addressed.³ The AU and the EU cannot afford to forgo a comprehensive strategy that actively involves public stakeholders—governments and cultural institutions such as museums, Universities, art schools—as well as private sector actors and civil society organisations in these matters. Additionally, an analysis of funding programmes and projects reveals that while numerous initiatives receive support, their **visibility and significance remain insufficient**.⁴ This is despite the adoption and promotion of successful methods for cultural programming, such

2. European Commission. 2016. Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Towards an EU Strategy for International Cultural Relations. JOIN(2016) 29 final, Brussels, June 8, 2016;

European Commission. 2017. Draft Council Conclusions on an EU Strategic Approach to International Cultural Relations. Cultural Affairs Committee, 7935/17, April 5, 2017.

3. Important memorial processes include those between Belgium and the Democratic Republic of Congo, France and Cameroon, and France and Madagascar, the latter marked by the recent restitution of three Sakalava skulls including the one of the former Sakalava King Toera. In an exhibition happening this year in 2025, the Musée du Quai Branly invited African and European researchers to look into the conditions of acquisition of 3200 artefacts that the museum now hosts, and that were taken during the "Dakar-Djibouti Mission", a French scientific expedition from 1931 to 1933.

4. Research conducted for the report: Cuny, E., Helly, D., Mbeki, L., Rethinking Africa-Europe cultural relations: Toward an AU–EU Cultural Cooperation Fit for the Future (2025, to be released).

as:

- cascade funding,
- reliance on local actors to manage grants,
- promotion of regional integration through local actors contributing to sector structuring,
- opportunities for intra-African collaboration and mobility,
- long-term support, particularly for capacity building among cultural administrators and entrepreneurs,
- diversification of funding (the "blending approach") to enable longer-term project support and adaptation to different project phases,
- and the engagement of the private sector.

Greater **transparency and visibility** regarding the EU's role and actions in this area would improve perceptions among cultural actors and partners. Similarly, the AU would benefit from complementing its strong strategies for the preservation and promotion of African cultural heritage with a **better-resourced and more adequately staffed cultural unit**, along with improved internal coordination.

The current policy frameworks of the AU and the EU still fall short of meeting the expectations and aspirations for **intercontinental solidarity and continental integration expressed by cultural and artistic communities**. The limited reference to culture in the most recent AU-EU ministerial meeting joint communiqué⁵ —and its complete omission from the core agenda of the Global Gateway— raises concerns that culture may be sidelined at the upcoming AU-EU Summit. This marginalisation would represent a **missed opportunity**, particularly at a time when there is growing recognition of culture's vital role in development, diplomacy, and social

cohesion. Although the CCIs are not explicitly mentioned in the Global Gateway, they can appear as beneficiaries of some initiatives (e.g. the flagship project Youth Mobility for Africa, the Team Europe Initiative "Investing in Young Businesses in Africa" and the project Digital Economy and Society in Sub-Saharan Africa as part of the Team Europe Initiative "Digital for Development") and would benefit from **greater recognition**. CCIs have a clear role to play in wealth creation, the development of new value chains, job creation, and skills acquisition — particularly for young people, women, and rural communities. The examples of previous **ACP-EU cultural cooperation programmes** reinforce this point.

What is needed, both at the AU and EU level, is an **incentive for real leadership**, accompanied with a clear mandate, better staffed teams and a real recognition of culture's importance as a sector. The last point is easy to make but harder to implement: the significance and role of **culture in international affairs should never be overlooked or questioned and should always feature in international partnerships — continental and intercontinental**. Regardless of political trends, because of their histories and the composition of their populations (including diasporas), African and European societies will always maintain close relations. If institutions are desirous of maintaining relevance, they should not ignore the topic of culture and rather **allow the regulatory frameworks to adapt to the challenges and needs shared by actors from the field**. The EU and the AU must engage in genuine reflection on the image they wish to project — at a continental level for the AU and an intercontinental level for the EU. The EU, in particular, should consider whether it is sustainable to maintain a

5. Culture is marginally mentioned once: "Ministers reaffirmed their shared belief in the transformative role of education, culture, science, and communication as pillars of peace, dialogue, and sustainable development, and underscored the important role of UNESCO." (p.8). Consilium Europa, Ministers of Foreign Affairs of member states of the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU), Joint Communiqué of the 3rd EU-AU Ministerial Meeting, 21 May 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/q50bjauc/joint-communique%C3%A9-21052025.pdf>

highly positive image in certain parts of the world (e.g. through its strong support for Ukraine) while, in others, it is still primarily associated with a security- and migration-focused approach.

The objective of this draft strategy is to enable supranational institutions from both continents to align their visions with those of communities, artists, and civil society, which are central to this partnership. As is often the case, **artists are ahead of their time**, and for many, regional integration is already a reality. Artists and cultural professionals also bear witness to the deep ties and solidarity between Africa and Europe. By taking ownership of this issue in the right way, the EU and the AU can only strengthen their **credibility** and **legitimacy**.

Pillars of a joint Africa-Europe strategy for cultural and creative partnerships

An ethical strategy: Values and principles to counter new (cultural) extractivism

New cultural and creative partnerships must be grounded in fairness⁶ to prevent long-term harm to cultural sectors. Authentic international cultural relations

(ICR) foster trust and mutual understanding among partners, but this can only be achieved when equity is placed at the heart of their design.⁷ It is also essential to acknowledge that CCIs themselves can be susceptible to **extractive dynamics⁸**, underscoring the need for continual reflection and commitment to fairness in all forms of collaboration. Today, musical genres such as Amapiano and Afrobeats are among the most prolific, yet the revenues reaching artists remain disproportionately low.

The EU and the AU face critical challenges around which they could strengthen their alliance on issues of mutual interest and strategic importance: artificial intelligence, data management, ownership, and ethics. They should affirm the need to protect both tangible and intangible cultural heritage amid the digital transformation of CCIs, and the **importance of ensuring decent working conditions for artists on both continents**. Additionally, the digital divide remains a significant concern, with rural areas at risk of being left behind despite the enthusiasm surrounding digital CCIs.⁹

While artists and creators readily adopt new technologies, they remain concerned about the business, legal, and long-term cultural challenges these innovations may bring: "there is a growing realisation that **unless the African music industry embraces new technology, it risks losing control of its talent and heritage.**"¹⁰

6. The values of fairness and justice have been advanced by authors of 2024 IFACCA collaborative work Culture as a Public Good: Navigating its role in policy debates and by Avril Joffe and Matina Magkou in Damaso, M. (dir.). 2025. The European Union as a Global Cultural Power (Transnational Approaches to Culture Book 2), De Gruyter.

7. The Marcel Hicter Association defines equity as "a synonym or shorthand for the adoption of authentic cultural relations that transcend power dichotomies and unlock culture's potential for development." In 2023, the European Union Network of National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC) published Not a toolkit! Fair collaboration in cultural relations: a reflAction, to promote awareness of fair practices and provide guidance for cultural practitioners and organisations striving to build equitable partnerships.

8. Interview with Alessandro Jedlowski, Associate professor in African Studies, Sciences Po Bordeaux on 22 October 2024 ; Interview with Samuel Samiai Andrews, Professor of Intellectual Property Law, Al Yamamah University College of Law, Al Khobar, on 5 December 2024.

9. An analysis of the beneficiaries of the TEI "Invest in Young Businesses in Africa" initiative suggests that most funded projects have been concentrated in urban and English-speaking countries. CCIs can help address this imbalance by fostering more inclusive development in rural areas notably through ecotourism and craft.

10. Ngobi, Bukonola. 2024. ARTificial Intelligence in Africa: Investigating the Impacts of AI on the Creative Community in Kenya. Creatives Garage, July 2024. <https://creativesgarage.org/aike-report-2024>

Knowledge of intellectual property law and rights are core competencies that must be more widely disseminated among cultural organisations as CCIs continue to evolve through digitisation. In the age of AI, these skills are becoming increasingly vital. As a **leading normative actor on the impact of AI on CCIs**, the EU could foster exchanges, peer learning, and capacity-building programmes with the AU, particularly in digital transformation, through initiatives tailored to the specific needs of CCIs. Joint capacity-building programmes drawing on expertise from both Europe and Africa could enable legal experts, policymakers, and creators to shape national, regional, and international frameworks that better protect cultural and creative works.

These programmes should also promote the **broader dissemination of this knowledge within creative communities**. Civil society organisations (CSOs) and legal NGOs that help artists defend their rights and revenues are already active in this area and should be integrated into cultural cooperation programmes to **amplify their impact**.¹¹ For instance, in early 2025, the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO), in collaboration with the African Intellectual Property Organization (OAPI), launched a transformative intellectual property mentorship programme under the EU-funded **Intellectual Property and Innovation in Africa (AfrIPI)** project to empower small and medium-sized enterprises across Africa.¹² CCIs could be recognised as a priority group for such efforts, given their potential to drive innovation, job creation, and sustainable economic growth. Strengthening connections with **African collective management organisations** in some regional states would also support

the development of a more integrated African creative market increasing its autonomy.

Developing sustainable African platforms for the **distribution of locally produced content is essential to strengthening domestic markets and preserving cultural diversity**. This should remain a key priority within investment strategies. So far, most platforms have struggled with long-term viability.¹³ The future of African CCIs depends on innovative, locally grounded business models backed by creators, investors, industry leaders and appropriate policy and legal frameworks. These efforts should position Africa as both a producer and consumer of its own creative industries.

Additionally, the cultural and creative sector holds great potential to ensure **sustainability and climate change adaptation**. Too often, policy communities work in isolation on challenges that are, in reality, interconnected. By creating opportunities for sustainable employment in rural communities—mindful of local geographical and climatic contexts—and by drawing upon long-established techniques and traditions that respect their environment, these sectors foster a more sustainable approach to growth and development. **Indigenous and ancestral knowledge** is gaining renewed recognition¹⁴, alongside intangible heritage, for its sensitivity and holistic approach embodied within the cultural and creative industries. Architecture, conservation, and traditional crafts are among the sectors that should be supported throughout the transition and integrated into broader economic planning.

11. Interview with Joshua Msambila, Director and Founder of Tanzania Artists Rights Organization, 23 December 2024.

12. AfrIPI Intellectual Property Rights & Innovation in Africa. 2025. "The EUIPO and OAPI Launch an Intellectual Property Mentorship Programme for African SMEs." January 31, 2025. <https://afripi.org/en/news/euipo-and-oapi-launch-intellectual-property-mentorship-programme-african-smes> (last accessed March 13, 2025).

13. Interview of Marie Lora-Mungai "Learn The Harsh Truth About Africa Creative Industries" on Venture Valley Channel, 22 February 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mejSzapWMr0>

14. UNESCO, Indigenous Knowledge, Ancestral Places: Navigating Change in UNESCO Designated Sites, 2025.

This would also help address the evident urban, social, and cultural challenges arising from urbanisation pressures and rural exodus. At present, **57% of Africa's population still lives in rural areas, although this proportion varies significantly between countries**—for instance, in Burundi, Niger, and Chad, more than 70% of the population is rural. Rural areas have particularly fragile economies. In some cases, the discontinuation of farming subsidies and consolidation of farmlands have resulted in less involvement in agriculture, limiting income generation and food security. Urbanisation is a double-edged sword and as much as relatives may sell cultural goods and send money back, **many people do not have the skills to survive in the rapidly changing world**. The failure of the school and healthcare system is particularly detrimental to the rural population which already access half the government services that urban populations do. **Public investment in CCIs holds the potential to bridge the widening gap between urban and rural areas across African countries** — where there is significant disparity and diversity in terms of access to knowledge, opportunities linked to digital transformation, and the ability to apply digital skills within culturally specific contexts.¹⁵

Ensuring a strong link between **culture, climate, and sustainability offers a more balanced and inclusive strategy for future cultural and creative partnerships**. Two projects within the Africa–Europe Partnership for Culture, running in the Southern African region until 2028 and looking at culture and heritage-based sustainable tourism and developing narratives that give meaning to tangible and intangible heritage, hold promise in recognising this connection and

could serve as models for future programming.

A joint strategy for cultural policy making: AU and EU's amplifying role

The EU and AU can ensure a policy and regulatory framework that helps CCIs achieve their full capacity in education, employment, and innovation. By working together on culture and building an innovative vision for CCIs as an example of renewed international partnerships' approach, the AU and the EU could reinvigorate their policy leadership and bring concrete positive outcomes to the sector. EU and AU efforts in culture and creative partnerships should not be seen as a threat or an encroachment on national sovereignty but rather as an **additional space for dialogue** and a means of creating new opportunities. Moreover, discussions with representatives of European member states and cultural institutes, African cultural institutions, organisations and institutions have shown that this political and financial investment was strongly supported.

The AU and EU both have a critical role to play on the multilateral stage in **advocating for the recognition of culture's social, and economic value for sustainable development, human well-being, and the safeguarding of democracy and peace**. Both institutions — though there are already engaged member states— should carry this message in international and multilateral forums and jointly advance advocacy strategies, supported by their vibrant civil societies and cultural ecosystems. **The AU and EU can encourage national efforts and champion states to take on regional and**

15. See SACO's work on The Role of Cultural and Creative Industries in Regenerating Urban and Rural Space and Economies in South Africa (2016) and on Rural Cultural Policy (2017).

continental leadership roles.¹⁶ This is particularly important at a time when both continents are experiencing a rise in nationalism, and when a trend of de-Europeanisation in foreign policy is being observed within the EU.¹⁷

This new approach to cultural and creative partnerships would complement the well-established actions of European Member States through their cultural institutes and would build on the recently launched Africa-Europe Partnerships for Culture¹⁸, composed of two continental, two Southern African and one Western African programmes as well as on the financing initiative amounting Creatifi¹⁹. The **growing interest of development agencies and public banks** in the cultural and creative sector in both Europe and Africa further justifies this push for a new strategy. With the support of partners such as the African Development Bank, Afreximbank, and the World Bank, the African Union and the European Union can drive the development of a strategy for cultural and creative partnerships while mindful of broader economic transitions and priorities and with prospects for sustainable development and job creation.

A creative economy strategy: Positioning CCIs as a key sector for sustainable growth, skills and employment

“Governments have a much greater role than just policy making. They need to be innovative and create an enabling environment that includes infrastructure and de-risking to harness private sector investments in key growth sectors.”

African Development Bank President
Akinwumi A. Adesina, 16 December 2021

CCIs employs more young people (aged 15–29) than any other sector globally²⁰ and attract youth who turn to entrepreneurship. The term "cultural entrepreneur" is now widely used. SMEs represent 95% of all companies and generate 80 percent of jobs across the African continent. It is essential to integrate and recognise CCIs' importance in business and financial support initiatives. This need was highlighted by the EU Ambassador to Kenya during the Stakeholders' Dialogue: Investing in Young Businesses in Africa (IYBA) Initiative,

16. The AU has begun establishing important partnerships with cultural organisations, such as the Music in Africa Foundation. These efforts should be continued and expanded, particularly by supporting organisations working at the national level—such as Connect for Culture Africa—that advocate for allocating at least 1% of national budgets to culture.

17. A phenomenon described as "a progressive renationalisation of foreign policy in three dimensions: 'the structural disintegration of collective policy making institutions'; 'the reconstruction of professional roles in exclusively/predominantly national terms'; and 'a repudiation (implicit or explicit) of well defined and established foundational norms – either procedural or substantive.'" in Thomas, C. D. (2021) The Return of Intergovernmentalism? DeEuropeanisation and EU Foreign Policy Decision-making, *Journal of European Integration*, 43:5, 619-635, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07036337.2021.1927013>; Szalai, P. (2019).

18. Launched in 2025, the Africa-Europe Partnerships for Culture represent an envelope of 30 million EUR in the current MFF as part of the Sub-Saharan Africa MIP Priority 2 (Governance, Peace and Security, and Culture). It stands among the newly launched programmes by INTPA for Africa-Europe ICR. Two other programmes, Procultura II PALOP-TL for Portuguese-speaking African countries and Creative Africa for the audio-visual industry were launched in 2025.

19. EU Cultural and Creative Industries Financing Initiative (CreatiFI) is the first dedicated EU programme that uses financial instruments for CCIs in the EU's international cooperation. 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. It amounts 20 million EUR and declined in three programmes that target the Africa (including North Africa), Caribbean and Pacific group of States.

20. Datta, N., Melchor, M. & Laclé, J. (2023), "Five ways creative and cultural industries respond to youth job challenges", World Bank Blogs, 5 Oct. 2023, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/jobs/five-ways-creative-and-cultural-industries-respond-youth-job-challenges> (last visited 6 Dec. 2024).

21. European External Action Service, EU in Kenya, Stakeholders' Dialogue: Investing in Young Businesses in Africa (IYBA) Initiative, 17 October 2024, intervention available in replay at: <https://www.youtube.com/live/O8WQuNEMIOI>

where she noted that "CCIs represent the strongest economic growth in Kenya (...) but that this is a sector where it is difficult to raise capital".²¹

The challenge of raising capital has been heard and addressed through the Creatifi programmes. Africa-Europe cultural cooperation should reinvent itself around the necessity to act along and support value chains in the CCIs. The framework for cultural cooperation between Africa and the EU has long focused on **creation and production**, showcasing talent, providing spaces for its representation (such as member states' cultural institutes), and encouraging co-production (through the ACP-EU programme for the audiovisual sector). Today, the European strategic framework of the **Global Gateway presents an opportunity to broaden this approach by engaging with value chains and turning towards innovative professions within the cultural and creative industries**. The AU and EU can ensure that such projects are leveraged at the continental level and lead to a greater recognition of culture and CCIs' assets for the continents' partnership and economic development while benefitting civil society and marginalised populations. The European Commission should take a more deliberate approach in positioning CCIs as a key sector for economic growth and sustainable development across its strategies and programmes.

Skills' identification must be based on **comprehensive needs assessments** conducted in collaboration with cultural actors, ensuring that they are tailored to both urban and rural contexts, with a strong emphasis on women entrepreneurs and youth. Skills development should be

strategically aligned with existing job needs, future opportunities, and roles that will help structure the sector. This approach will support the growth of CCIs in Africa, making them more sustainable and profitable for African creators. A broad assessment should be undertaken to determine the skills that artists, creators, and cultural entrepreneurs need today to build sustainable and decent livelihoods.²² Digital skills training, for example, should be practically aligned with the skills that truly empower young people in their business ventures.

Building on this assessment, joint AU-EU training programmes should extend beyond artistic creation to cover the full spectrum of CCI jobs, including pre- and post-production roles, thereby helping to structure and professionalise the sector. Among the roles and competencies identified in this research, particular urgency lies in supporting professions related to **contract management, the distribution of creative works, and expertise in the legal frameworks governing creation**. This includes sales agents responsible for distribution and negotiation, who could greatly benefit from training on legal aspects and contract management. Additionally, there is a need for skilled professionals in **commercial roles, as well as in pre-production and post-production**—areas that require careful planning and resource allocation beyond just the creative work itself. Moreover, the demand for highly competent sound technicians remains crucial to ensuring high-quality production standards across the industry.

To ensure long-term impact, **cultural programmes for job creation and**

22. The second part of this project, led by the South African Cultural Observatory (SACO), involved a survey of young South African creatives (up to age 35) who have participated in a European cultural cooperation project. Analysed through a foresight lens, the survey provides valuable insights into the skills that should be supported to foster job creation and sustainable careers in the sector. See interim results in Gaylad, J., Joffe, A., Mtotywa, A., Pearse N., Shelver, A., Vitshima, S., Derrocks, R., Cuny, E. Creative Futures: A Preliminary Exploration of Youth Perceptions on Cultural Cooperation and its Potential in Africa and Europe, UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development – MONDIACULT 2025, Digital Library, 2025, <https://mondiacult2025.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Technical-paper-M25-Creative-Futures-NMU-SACO.pdf>.

sustainable revenues should be anchored in local ecosystems, leveraging local actors. In addition to creativity, other skills are essential to the success of the cultural and creative sector. Soft skills such as leadership and strategic networking should be supported for a self-sustaining sector and the exploitation of business opportunities. The cultural and creative sector should also be recognised for its ability to develop such skills and contribution to the broader economy.

An open cultural strategy for all generations: Youth and civil society

Art is an extension of ourselves, because our lives alone are not enough. No other field offers this level of freedom and responsibility, this capacity for transformation.

Koyo Kouoh (2025)²³

Building on the positive outcomes of the European Commission's Youth Sounding Board and the AU-EU Youth Cooperation Hub, the strategy should pay particular attention and voice to young people within the policy framework for cultural cooperation. **Programmes should be designed to reflect the concerns and needs of young creatives and artists who are navigating today's global challenges.** Youth should be empowered as both promoters of culture and guardians of their cultural heritage, and young creatives should be actively consulted and invited to contribute to proposals that reflect their diverse realities and perspectives.

Strengthening creative media training for young people—grounded in the principles

of free, accurate, and fact-checked information, and aimed at supporting the **vitality and independence of civil society**—is a shared priority for both the AU and EU. Joint media and journalism training programmes could be developed or expanded to equip young journalists with digital and creative skills, create new job opportunities through innovative media production, and counter disinformation using locally developed fact-checking tools. Supporting African newspapers in this way would foster an open, pluralistic, and inclusive media landscape between Europe and Africa.

The role of literature and authors in guiding future journalists and young people engaged in creative media is also valuable. Their involvement can inspire youth to develop an **independent and ethical approach to media and information**, promoting a grassroots perspective rooted in critical thinking and literature.

Combining digital skills training with traditional education in independent journalism and fact-checking will help drive the growth of creative media, generate employment, and reinforce free expression and independent media—both essential pillars of democratic life. **Building bridges between the Team Europe Democracy Initiative** and existing projects that advance digital skills for media and creative industries through cultural initiatives would further enhance their impact. In this context, cultural actors and CSOs should be actively involved in shaping and implementing the initiative.

A future-oriented strategy: education, research and innovation

23. A leading figure in contemporary African art and former head of the Zeitz Museum in Cape Town, Koyo Kouoh sadly passed away this year, just before she was to curate the 2026 Venice Biennale. Her work and words continue to remind us of the profound influence artists hold through the vision and purpose they bring to the world.

The **AU–EU Innovation Agenda** acknowledges the limitations of the current occupational categories used in its statistics—based on ILO classifications—and highlights the need to broaden their scope to better **include professions in the arts, social sciences, and humanities, which often fall outside conventional frameworks.** The Agenda also recommends monitoring the representation of the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) on the EuroQuity ENRICH in Africa platform over time, as this would yield valuable insights into their development.

The EuroQuity ENRICH in Africa Virtual Community Platform—part of the ENRICH project funded by the European Commission’s Horizon 2020 programme—seeks to strengthen EU–Africa tech and innovation ecosystems by promoting collaboration among innovators and linking incubators, accelerators, investors, corporates, and policymakers to advance social impact and green business. **In 2023, CCIs ranked as the third most represented sector on the platform, accounting for 8% of registered companies, behind agri-tech and agriculture (25%) and tech agencies (9%)** By 2024, CCIs remained among the leading sectors but declined slightly to 5%, aligning with the tech sector. Over the same period, agri-tech and agriculture dropped to 16%, while fintech rose sharply to 15%. These trends are encouraging but also signal a need for a growing recognition of CCIs within the AU–EU innovation landscape.

Research has underlined the importance of collaboration between professionals in traditional tech sectors—such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)—and those in creative fields, noting that such cooperation is vital for

innovation.²⁴ Technologies employed in the creative industries often feature low barriers to entry, fostering wider accessibility and faster diffusion.²⁵ **This dynamic creates tangible opportunities for creatives, translating their skills into innovative and sustainable employment.** Innovation is already flourishing within the CCIs, with increasingly strong linkages between culture and technology that nurture environments where both can thrive. Both the AU and EU are well placed to strengthen these synergies.

An illustrative example is the S+T+ARTS Africa programme, launched by the EU Directorate-General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CNECT). The initiative builds a cross-sectoral community connecting artists, companies, scientists, researchers, and entrepreneurs. Recently, it launched the artist residencies “Afropean Intelligence,” which explore the uses of AI by examining its impacts and collaboratively addressing its challenges within local contexts.

Programmes supporting the cultural and creative sectors should therefore be **prioritised in future Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe projects, with a focus on job creation as the foundation for new educational pathways.** Cultural professionals have also emphasised that ensuring proper **legal protections for artists should be a priority in education programmes** and that stronger partnerships between African and European schools and universities could play a key role in addressing this issue. Art and heritage schools such as the École du Patrimoine Africain and the École des Beaux-Arts de Kinshasa should be mobilised as they already train large numbers of young professionals for cultural careers. International partners

24. Rodríguez-Pose, A. & Lee, N. 2020. Hipsters vs. geeks? Creative workers, STEM and innovation in US cities. Cities 100: Article 102653.

25. CrossBoundary. 2024. "Tech-Driven Renaissance: Unleashing Africa’s Creative Economy." CrossBoundary, May 10, 2024. <https://crossboundary.com/tech-driven-renaissance-unleashing-africas-creative-economy/>.



and organisations —such as ALIPH and the World Heritage Fund— could further contribute to these efforts.

Finally, shared challenges such as climate change, sustainable tourism, and new museum strategies should be integrated into broader education and research partnerships between African and European universities and institutions. **The EU Young African Leadership Programme could be expanded to include a dedicated CCI component**, while Erasmus Mundus could be widened to involve more African higher education institutions, ensuring deeper collaboration and mutual capacity building in the cultural and creative sectors.

Institutional memory and data underpinning the strategy

The strategy should **ensure continuity of the policy frameworks**. The AU and EU should ensure that programmes allow dialogue and co-creation to persist and flourish. **Programming change should not hamper people-to-people relations**. Advanced impact assessment enables institutions to effectively identify and prioritise projects that merit continuation.

Continuity will be ensured by preserving institutional memory, building on the successes of past European cultural programmes—an essential factor for the EU's credibility with its partners. For example, the *Programme de soutien aux initiatives culturelles décentralisées* (PSIC) was implemented from 2006 and financed via the European Development Fund for an initial eight-year period and then renewed in Benin. It contributed to a better assumption of responsibility for Benin's

cultural development in its dual technical and geographical dimension, in particular by supporting the emergence and sustainable strengthening of decentralised cultural players as well as the structuring and organisation of the Beninese cultural sector. Years later, in 2025, the impact on the quality of Benin's cultural projects is still being felt.²⁶ However, conducting extensive research is required to quantify these benefits and best practices. Institutional memory must be supported by data, **which is essential for justifying policies and supporting a sector**.

A **continuous analysis** would strengthen the impact assessment and design of funding programmes by engaging both established actors —such as diplomatic and cultural institutions, civil society, investors, businesses, entrepreneurs, and academia— and emerging stakeholders within the CCIs. The AU and the EU could reinforce this approach by producing an annual report on the implementation of their cultural programmes, ensuring coordination, continuity, and the consolidation of successful initiatives. Such a report would help both institutions identify, measure, document, and enhance the outcomes of cultural and creative programmes, with a focus on their societal and economic impact in partner countries.

Currently, data on the value of CCIs in Africa remains limited, as does information on the broader **social benefits of culture and the CCIs in both Africa and Europe**—beyond their purely economic contribution. To address these gaps, this reporting process could be complemented by the establishment of an **Observatory for Africa-Europe Cultural Relations**, supported by networks of artists and cultural professionals forming the Africa-Europe cultural ecosystem. Building on existing initiatives, the Observatory would guide future decision-making through

26. Interview with Abdramane Kamate, Director General of Marché des arts du spectacle africain (MASA), on 16 January 2025.

innovative and inclusive methods, such as surveys, foresight exercises, and participatory workshops for experience-sharing. The Observatory could bring together African and European professionals to **co-design evaluation tools adapted to local contexts and priorities, integrating sustainability considerations and offering guidance for transformative change.** Its work could also be reinforced by creative impact hubs contributing to the implementation and scaling of these transformative practices.

A cultural and creative economy action plan for AU and EU institutions

To ensure the efficiency of future cultural cooperation programmes, the AU, the EU and their member states will be well advised, at the upcoming AU-EU summit, to agree on a joint **multi-year cultural action plan.** Such a plan would require improving the human resources and financial capacity for culture. Individual impulse more than coordinated efforts is driving action within the AU and the EU, and the Culture Division is one of the AU's least staffed. A larger team should be made available for the unit to identify challenges and opportunities, with an adequate budget to conduct facilitation and engagement activities.

Different actors are involved with culture within the AU. **Appointing the Pan-African Cultural Congress as a permanent overseeing body could ensure better coordination,** and support ownership in the cultural ecosystems usually represented within the PACC.²⁷ This would also ensure the AU has good

information from the sector and could benefit from strategic advising on decisions to be discussed at the AU level. The same logic goes for the EU where culture is a cross-sectoral aspect of large priorities. **The unit in charge of piloting cultural programmes should be well equipped to monitor the impact of wider programmes and connect with other actors on CCIs and cultural relations.**

The **continuous training of cultural policy administrators** is essential in an international context undergoing rapid transformation —technologically, economically, and geopolitically— and should be a priority within AU-EU partnerships. Joint training programmes for AU and EU agents in charge of ICR could be a meaningful way to share best practices. By empowering both institutions to better understand CCIs' relevance in the partnership and identify new areas of cooperation or adjustments, making the AU and EU **responsive organisations.** Cultural actors and experts with diverse backgrounds (legal, business, technical) could be invited to the training to share their insights and perceptions, increasing the bottom-up approach of institutions' learning.

Both continents are facing significant crises, some of which they share. These include conflicts leading to population displacement and threats to cultural heritage, as well as challenges related to **misinformation, cybersecurity,** and positioning themselves within the **global AI market.** Continuous dialogue between EU and AU administrators on these issues would be beneficial to the institutions. Cultural policy administrators would be better equipped to assess support programmes for CCIs across the continent, focusing on the production of legitimate, validated data essential for recognising the sector's **social and economic value.**

27. Recommendation formulated by Daves Ghuzza, Producer/Director, former Chairperson of the Bureau of the 5th Pan-African Cultural Congress, during an interview on 17 January 2025.

In addition to ensuring institutional memory and continuous learning, agents of EU Member States and institutions, and Delegations should be encouraged to adopt a **cooperative approach to cultural engagement**. The creation of EUNIC, while highly promising, has not yet led to the necessary mindset shift for true **European ownership of cultural projects**. Too often, initiatives depend on individual drive and commitment within EU institutions and in Delegations.

As culture is a supplementary competence of the EU, **Member States remain the main political entity for cultural affairs**, and they benefit from well established and visible cultural institutes and networks. The Team Europe approach that encourages a renewed cooperation among Member States, in an intergovernmental spirit and bringing together development and cultural agencies, seems to be well received by partners. The African-European museum partnerships, for instance, demonstrate how this approach can help address historically sensitive issues within a broader framework of continental and intercontinental collaboration. More continuous and inclusive knowledge-sharing and exchanges would help building a **Community of Practice for Culture**²⁸ among “Team Europe” (EU Delegations and Member States) in Africa.

“We can only reinvent if we know how to look backwards and forwards at the same time.”

Achille Mbembe, *Sortir de la grande nuit. Essai sur l’Afrique décolonisée* (2013)

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This brief reflects the independent views of the authors, drawing on their prior research and professional expertise. The research was conducted autonomously, and the recommendations presented are based on the evidence and data collected. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official position of culture Solutions.

28. McNeilly, N., Zayas, C., Valenza, D., Helly, D., #TeamEurope: A community of practice on culture for EU Delegations, culture Solutions, 1 July 2021, <https://www.culturesolutions.eu/events/teameurope-a-community-of-practice-on-culture-for-eu-delegations/>



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