

## Decent work at the heart of the EU-Africa Strategy

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### 1. General

- On 26-27 October 2007, at the initiative of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and its Portuguese affiliates, several dozen African and European trade unions joined the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), ITUC-Africa and ETUC in Lisbon for the [1st EU-Africa Trade Union Summit](#). Our work resulted in a Trade Union Declaration, which was presented to the Heads of State and Government attending the Lisbon Summit in December 2007.
- One year on from the summit, the European, African and international trade union movement is concerned at the lack of conclusive signs pointing to progress on the Lisbon demands. The ETUC, ITUC and ITUC-Africa appreciate the work undertaken with civil-society organisations, particularly in Brussels, but all agree that to date there has been very little information regarding implementation of the Strategy in the EU and Africa and that civil-society involvement has been lacking since the Lisbon Summit. The European and international trade union movement and ITUC-Africa lament this fact, since consultation of and participation by civil society are a vital necessity in the current context. However, the setting up of Joint Experts Groups (JEGs) is seen as a good sign.
- The social situation, particular as regards employment, has deteriorated significantly since the Lisbon Summit and the outlook is far from promising. The combination of several large-scale crises (financial and economic, food and environmental) is having a socio-economic impact, the real effects of which have yet to be accurately quantified. In 2008, thousands of workers in many African countries took to the streets to express their frustration and concern about the food crisis and to demand solutions. Meanwhile, the International Labour Office forecasts that 51 million jobs will be lost worldwide this year, including thousands in Europe and Africa. This disaster will further accentuate the disparities and the development gap between Africa and Europe. This situation highlights how essential the partnership is to strengthening democracy, peace and development, whilst fully recognising the asymmetry in the relationship between Africa and the EU.
- The Communication from the [Commission](#) to the Council and the European Parliament and the [accompanying working document](#) (17 October 2008) make a number of proposals and relate them to specific initiatives linked to EU development aid. Although the proposals address some of the issues covered by our demands, the general approach

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adopted and the associated guidelines are a far cry from the Lisbon Trade Union Summit Declaration of October 2007.

## 2. The Decent Work Agenda – a pillar of the EU-Africa Strategy

- The Decent Work Agenda, understood as the development and promotion of productive jobs, chosen freely without any discrimination, as well as of social protection and social dialogue, must be at the heart of the EU-Africa Strategy. However, in the 7<sup>th</sup> [partnership](#) arising from the Lisbon Strategy, the issue of migration – itself an important topic – dominates, overshadowing the pillars of the Decent Work Agenda. The Commission Communication of 17 October 2008 only reinforces this situation.
- In the trade union movement's view, the 7<sup>th</sup> partnership must put decent work firmly back at the heart of the Strategy and propose guidelines covering all pillars of the agenda with a view to:
  - creating decent jobs;
  - protecting jobs in accordance with the ILO Conventions;
  - strengthening and extending social protection<sup>1</sup>;
  - creating or strengthening institutional and autonomous social dialogue structures at national, sub-regional, regional and bi-regional level;
  - mainstreaming gender and fully advocating gender equality;
  - developing an approach to migration based on human rights, development and international labour standards.

## 3. An approach to migration based on human rights and international labour standards

- The Commission Communication of 17 October focuses on four main areas: data compilation, remittances, tackling illegal migration and cooperation with the Diaspora. Such an approach ignores the essential issues, namely:
  - the rights of migrant workers and the adoption and ratification of international instruments relating to them (including ILO Conventions 97 and 143 and the United Nations Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families) by individual countries;
  - the development of regular channels of migration, including for less skilled workers.
- Further, the approach taken by the Commission Communication of 17 October 2008 emphasises migration flows between African countries and focuses on curbing migration to the EU. The Communication also deals extensively with skilled migration, which it wishes to promote but also to direct and control very tightly. There are no initiatives for less qualified migrants. Moreover, the proposed strategy ignores the issue of

<sup>1</sup> On this subject, see the latest ISSA study showing that the development of social protection fosters broader development, particularly in African countries



the ‘brain drain’ and the loss of skilled staff, which is creating real problems for African countries’ development. Fair solutions to these problems need to be found through negotiations between European and African governments and social partners.

- Other issues must be factored into this approach, most notably:
  - the consultation of workers’ organisations;
  - the definition of transparent entry criteria;
  - the role of employment agencies;
  - the retention of social-security entitlements;
  - the recognition of qualifications acquired under vocation training programmes.
- The Commission Communication fails to address migration governance, whereas the 2004 ILO Conference (and Migration Action Plan), the ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration, the various regional tripartite meetings in Africa and the African Union’s Strategic Framework for Migration Policy in Africa converge in their approach. They focus on the migration of workers and state that governance of migration in Africa (and elsewhere) must be improved in order to make migration an instrument for social development. Good governance entails a rights-based approach to migration management and aims to maximise the benefits of migration for origin and destination countries as well as for migrants themselves and non-migrant workers, and to mitigate its negative effects. African countries also stress the importance of free movement and protection of migrant workers. In other words, the Commission Communication of 17 October is out of step with the needs expressed by African governments themselves and within the framework of the ILO.
- The national, regional and international regulatory framework governing migration must be harmonised in order to achieve:
  - greater consistency of migration;
  - better application of relevant legislation (particularly on the trade union rights of migrant workers);
  - harmonisation of social rights between different legal instruments;
  - better compilation of statistical data;
  - transposition of such data into specific policies;
  - clear and consistent national policies;
  - strengthening of administrative institutions; and
  - better training for key players (employment ministries and social partners, ministries of territorial administration and foreign ministries) with a view to drawing up, applying and jointly assessing migration policies.
- In addition, it is important that migration flows should be managed in strict accordance with the industrial-relations system in each country, with the social partners fully involved in decision-making.



- In its Communication, the European Commission mentions a number of initiatives, the aims and priorities of which are unclear. Furthermore, it fails to propose programmes for cooperating with African countries and regional bodies on developing the legislative framework, policies and administration of migration flows.

#### 4. The role of the ILO and the ILO Conventions

- To ensure consistency of policymaking, the International Labour Office must be fully involved in implementing this Strategy, particularly the 7th partnership.
- Similarly, the content of other partnerships and action plans needs to be consistent with the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. Accordingly, many parts of the Communication would have benefited from tying in the points raised to the issue of decent work. For example: when talking about increasing investment in infrastructure or energy, and the partnership on climate change, why not mention the positive impact these measures could have on employment?
- Ratification of and compliance with the core labour standards is a necessary condition for the sustainable development of African and European countries. Accordingly, the Joint Strategy must provide for mechanisms, programmes and actions enabling effective implementation of the fundamental principles and rights at work as recognised in the ILO [Declaration](#).
- Likewise, the Strategy must include mechanisms for ensuring that European enterprises investing in Africa abide by international standards on social and environmental responsibility such as the [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#) and the [ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy](#).

#### 5. The social dimension of regional integration

- The social dimension of regional integration processes is key.
- In the Lisbon Declaration of October 2007, the trade unions called on the European Commission not to subject African countries to trade demands beyond those specified in the WTO context. This issue is still very much under discussion in the context of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).
- In addition, the trade unions stated that trade integration in Africa, which is still in its initial phase, is a precondition for the completion of bi-regional African/European trade agreements. The trade union movement has widely criticised the signing of interim EPAs, accompanied by bilateral negotiations, and the negative effects on employment and regional integration processes in Africa. This situation runs counter to the stated aims of the EPAs, since African states must strengthen their regional integration prior to any agreement being signed.

- The free movement of workers remains a challenge requiring urgent attention in the regional integration processes. These processes must combine the economic dimension with social and environmental issues.

## 6. Promoting education at all levels

- Placing decent work at the heart of this strategy means prioritising education (primary, secondary, university as well as vocational). We regret the fact that the action plan focuses almost exclusively on university education and exchange and migration programmes for those individuals who will benefit from those programmes.
- The people of Africa require urgent and universal access to free, high-quality basic education.
- The development of vocational training programmes is another major challenge linked directly to the creation and promotion of decent jobs in African countries. In this connection, capacity building in human resource management must be prioritised.

## 7. Trade union participation in implementing the partnership

- The participation of European Union and African trade unions in implementing the various partnerships, particularly the 7<sup>th</sup>, is vital. As such, the full integration of ETUC, ITUC-Africa and ITUC representatives into the Joint Expert Group (JEG) must take place as a matter of urgency, as must social-partner involvement in the high-level discussions on the strategy at national, sub-regional and regional level.
- At the same time, we believe that issues relating to this strategy must be included in social dialogue body discussions.
- Finally, there should be full union participation in the activities mentioned in the Commission Communication of 17 October 2008.

## 8. Climate change

- The trade unions emphasise that cooperation on climate change should link environmental preservation, economic growth and the creation of decent jobs in a sustainable way. Furthermore, the unions believe that the EU and all industrialised countries (whether signatories or not) must help the African continent to deal with the impact of climate change on key sectors of its economy such as agriculture and fishing. Climate change is also a threat to the lives, health and livelihoods of African communities. European countries must take steps to provide the resources needed by adaptation funds, particularly those created recently under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- The trade unions believe it is necessary to create consistency between policies on combating poverty and those on adapting to climate change. We think that a holistic approach should be adopted at both domestic and donor level, including:



- the development of sustainable infrastructure and services: public investment planning must take into account the issue of environmental sustainability;
- skills development: workers and their communities must be informed, involved and trained so that they can meet the challenges that will face them in the workplace and in their day-to-day lives. Lack of information is a significant barrier to adaptation;
- social protection: social protection makes individuals less vulnerable. In addition to infrastructure, other needs must be met in order to counter the effects of climate change, namely access to decent housing, food security, access to clean drinking water, the right to a minimum wage and the right to social security.

## 9. The MDGs, ODA and debt cancellation

- The EU-Africa partnership must help African countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
- In addition, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocated by EU Member States must be raised to 0.7% of national GDP. Likewise, remittances, which generally promote development, should benefit from tax relief and rapid transfer mechanisms, and should not replace Official Development Assistance. There should also be a discussion about the solidarity of migrants with their families back home and their difficulties integrating into host countries, due particularly to the privations they undergo. These funds, though now substantial, should not replace ODA since they are governed by a logic of private and individual solidarity which differs from the requirements and underlying principles of solidarity between the EU and Africa.
- At Lisbon, European and African trade unions also called on European governments to cancel all the bilateral debt of African countries as a matter of utmost urgency, particularly the most vulnerable countries that respect human rights. Similarly, European countries must coordinate their positions within the international financial institutions so that all of the multilateral debt of these countries is cancelled without imposing conditions that run counter to the interests of local people.

## 10. Peace and security in Africa

- Peace and security in Africa must be a priority. The EU-Africa strategy must allow the African Union not only to better manage conflicts but also to prevent them, mainly by improving the living standards of the people of Africa through implementation of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda.

## 11. Democratic governance

- Democratic governance is a centrepiece of the dialogue and partnership between Europe and Africa. Democratic governance must be considered in its entirety and include respect for human rights and labour standards, the rule of law, institution building, social-partner involvement and the fight against corruption.



- Social dialogue is key to securing the socio-economic consensus that enable development. The trade unions have called on the European Union to include the social partners systematically in the drawing-up of national and regional indicative programmes (NIPs and RIPs) and to consider them as fully-fledged development stakeholders with access to Official Development Assistance.