



## CONCEPT NOTE

### Human Capital Development

#### Introduction

Focus will be put on **human capital development, including researchers' mobility and training and capacity building in higher education and research, as a key factor to tackle current and future crises** and contribute to development of skills for more resilient societies. The objective will be to promote and better coordinate existing cooperation, academic mobility, fellowships and doctoral training programmes to reinforce the EU-Africa cooperation, including synergies at EU level, through the **Erasmus+ programme** and the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)**. Human Capital Development should of course build on existing initiatives and support emerging areas in critical domains such as the digital agenda, the green economy, innovation, artificial intelligence.

A new initiative is suggested, to fight brain drain and incite MSCA African researchers to pursue their research in Africa: **the establishment of a return grant mechanism.**

#### Erasmus+

The **Erasmus+** programme has been playing an increasing role in enhancing investment in people and skills by multiplying learning mobility opportunities for African students and university staff. Erasmus is wider than mobility: the programme significantly enhances institutional Capacity Building in Higher Education. By facilitating individual learning mobility across Africa, the **Intra-Africa Academic Mobility scheme** supports also the portability of qualifications and deeper continental integration through people-to-people exchanges.

The needs of the post-Covid recovery underline the importance of the education initiatives for skills and inclusion. A high level of attention and interaction will need to be maintained and increased.

The 2020 **Erasmus+** target of 35 000 mobilities for African students and researchers, was within close reach until the Covid-19 outbreak, and the 105 000 African mobilities target for 2027 remains valid.

#### The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)

The COVID19 crisis highlighted the need to rely on a **highly skilled research-based international community** able to detect future challenges, to communicate scientific evidence to policy-makers and the public and to work across disciplines.

In this context, **MSCA**, the EU flagship programme for researchers' mobility and training through the development of excellent doctoral programmes, collaborative research and fellowship schemes, has

funded **more than 100 projects** which allow to inform better policies and strategies, and to build resources in **the fight against COVID-19 and infectious diseases**.

MSCA already triggered **new dynamics for cooperation with Africa**, especially building-upon and complementing important initiatives such as the EU and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP), which will be of even higher importance in this context.

**Further participation of African researchers and organisations** in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions is encouraged. This should be done in **close coordination with the African Union Commission**:

- By building on already existing EU-Africa flagship initiatives and partnerships, such as **EDCTP, FNSSA or AfricaConnect** with which contacts are already underway;
- By working for mutual benefit with regional and continental networks and associations such as **AAU, ARUA**, in order notably to extend information to universities and host organisations not yet involved in the MSCA;
- By promoting the usefulness of National Contact Points (NCPs) dedicated to the MSCA, to inform and train individual researchers or host organisations;
- By cooperating further with regional networks, to organise information seminars and trigger new dynamics of cooperation.

Unlike Erasmus+, the MSCA have no dedicated budget to Africa, thus the need to promote the actions, ensure a better coverage in the spread of the information, enhance participation in the programme.

### **The initiative**

The need to **encourage African countries to further increase their participation** in the MSCA goes together with a reflection on **brain drain**. The issue of brain drain was raised by a number of African Delegations at the High level Policy Dialogue Senior Officials Meeting which took place in Addis Ababa in November 2019. As highlighted in the conclusions of this Policy Dialogue, an exploration on ways to set-up **incentivising return grants mechanisms for MSCA fellows from Africa** in order to counter brain drain is currently underway.

### **Objectives**

The current crisis and its recovery highlight how much **human capital development** is a central issue, which needs to be addressed. It is key to **strengthen professional development opportunities for researchers and research and innovation capacities in Africa**, to tackle current and future crises and contribute to development of skills for more resilient societies.

The ongoing works on the possibility of a **return grant mechanism** for MSCA fellows from Africa lead to a first conclusion: this scheme should not only be limited to a salary, but also foresee a **support to the returning host organisations**. A good research environment is essential for the return phase, through the provision of adequate funding, structural support and close cooperation between the European and the African host organisations.

A working group will be set up with representatives of the AUC, of EU and AU Member States, and of the concerned DGs from the European Commission (DG DEVCO, DG RTD, DG EAC). It will meet on a regular basis, with a view to identify the best support to tackle brain drain.

### **Funding**

Additional funding is needed **for a return grant mechanism**, which could take the form of a “**EU-Africa twinning grant**”. Such a scheme would concern **doctoral candidates** involved in Innovative Training Networks and Individual Fellows (**post-doctoral researchers**), a potential population of 450 African researchers for the current MSCA programme. The incentive mechanism should focus on **working conditions and a close cooperation between the European and the African host organisations**.

A first estimated budget would be in the range of **15-20 million EUR for 5 years**, depending on the scope of the twinning mechanisms to be set-up, with an implementation to be started in 2022.

### **Background**

#### **Erasmus+**

Since 2015, The EU has significantly increased the numbers of university scholarships and exchanges through **Erasmus+** (26 000 Africans benefiting) with 53 African countries involved and is also supporting universities develop their capacity for **knowledge creation and innovation** for economic development and job creation with 146 projects targeting Africa.

Erasmus+ also finances small-scale projects **in the informal youth sector** with African youth organisations and the non-profit sector (NGOs and social businesses for example), promoting informal learning and helping young people start their own businesses and play an active part in their local communities.

#### **The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)**

The **MSCA** is the EU flagship programme for researchers’ mobility and training through the development of excellent doctoral programmes, collaborative research and fellowship schemes. The MSCA support researchers in all scientific domains, promote collaboration between the academic, scientific and business communities, boost the careers of scientists at all stages through the development of excellent doctoral training in Europe and beyond which promote inter-sectoral and international mobility. MSCA is **the most international component of Horizon 2020**, representing more than half of the total third countries’ participations.

**Since 2014, more than 1400 African researchers** from **43 different countries** have been involved in the programme, which account for **more than 240 participations of 164 different African organisations**. The MSCA are open to European and African organisations interested to advance knowledge for **mutual benefit**.

Erasmus+ and MSCA have been addressed for the first time under a Human capital development chapter, including researchers’ mobility and training, in Addis Ababa in November 2019.

### **African initiatives**

Existing African platforms such as through the African Academy of Sciences: research chairs initiatives, the science granting councils initiative, etc. could be used to further promote exchanges between both sides. In Africa, initiatives could build on and leverage existing continental frameworks and interventions geared towards institutional capacity strengthening; the development of high end skills; recruitment and retention of excellent researchers.

The Science Granting Councils Initiative is a multi-funder initiative that aims to strengthen the capacities of 15 science granting councils in Sub-Saharan Africa in order to support research and evidence-based policies that will contribute to economic and social development. The OR Tambo Research Chairs, which aims to contribute to expanded research and innovation capacities in and for Africa, in alignment with AU Agenda 2063 and STISA 2024; attract and retain excellent researchers and scientists within Africa's higher education system; contribute to Africa's global research competitiveness while responding to the continent's socio-economic needs as well as contribute to Africa's career pathways for young and mid-career researchers, with a strong research, innovation and human capital development output trajectory. Another example is the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) which is a network of universities from different countries and different historical backgrounds, but with a common vision. ARUA aims to enhance research and graduate training in member universities through a number of channels, including the setting up of Centres of Excellence (CoEs) to be hosted by member universities. Such initiatives could be used as a model as well as to build collaboration between Africa and Europe in key sectors such as the digital agenda, the green economy, innovation, artificial intelligence.