

Europe's "Choose Europe" pitch must be a two-continent deal

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Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's invitation on 29 April 2025 for scientists to "[make Europe their home](#)" is shrewd geopolitics: talent is a scarce resource in the 2020s and Washington's culture-war skirmishes have made some U.S. academics restless. Her call that the attack on academics is a '[gigantic miscalculation](#)' is spot-on. Yet if the European Union (EU) merely diverts brainpower from Boston to Berlin, it will entrench - rather than heal - the innovation gap that still separates Europe from Africa. The next step is obvious: embed Africa in the "Choose Europe" package so that American researchers also find pathways to its southern neighbour, avoiding another miscalculation.

A shared talent agenda already exists - but needs teeth

The AU-EU Innovation Agenda, adopted in 2023, recognises that "[reinforcing scientific and academic mobility ... while limiting the risks of talent drain](#)" is essential to a balanced partnership. Its [accompanying roadmap](#) lists concrete instruments - Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, Erasmus+, Intra-Africa Mobility, EIT Knowledge & Innovation Communities - that can be scaled to pull talent in both directions. Stakeholders who contributed to the Agenda's public consultation were explicit: success depends on creating "[a conducive environment for mobility between continents while ... working to reduce and reverse brain drain of young, talented African researchers](#)". This is essentially repeating the call to operate within a 'Common Values' framework.

Science-policy actors inside Europe concur. The 2024 [Science Europe High-Level Workshop](#) urged governments to "improve conditions for researcher mobility across Europe and beyond to attract and retain talent" and to guarantee reciprocity in collaboration. The political mandate for a mobility talent model is therefore already on the books; Brussels now has to operationalise it. And African partners are at the ready to support this move.

Why include Africa in a US - EU talent partnership?

Including Africa in a prospective US - EU talent pool is not charity - it is strategic policy. Africa's young demographics and unparalleled biodiversity provide living laboratories for frontier work in health, climate resilience and digital-finance models, yielding data and use-cases that European soil simply cannot supply. As African – European partnerships deepen, across business, academia, culture and policy, it makes sense to infuse this partnership with talent from the US. At the same time, the [AU-EU Innovation Agenda](#) warns that, without deliberate mobility safeguards, Europe risks accelerating Africa's brain drain and undermining its own capacity-building goals. This is a trend we already see in health and engineering, to name but two. Finally, positioning the EU as a defender of global scientific freedom - rather than a guardian of its own borders - strengthens Europe's normative credibility vis-à-vis Washington and Beijing and across African capitals, turning open science into a soft-power asset instead of a slogan.

Recommendations: how the EU can make Africa a co-creator of the "Choose Europe" drive

1. The first recommendation is to alter the narrative around Africa, promoting the numerous positive aspects to working, living and conducting research in Africa. This narrative change will enhance the desirability of collaboration with the continent.
2. Another option is to create an 'Africa Desk' within the forthcoming 'Choose Europe' one-stop shop. Every fast-track visa issued to a non-EU scientist should automatically include a zero-bureaucracy pathway for short-term mobility to an African host institution matched to the EU employer.
3. Expand existing Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and Erasmus+ budgets with dedicated funding that requires grantees to spend at least 25% of their fellowship period at an African centre of excellence, with clear publication opportunities, return tickets and reintegration grants funded up-front.
4. Incentivise EU universities that hire U.S. principal investigators to negotiate joint professorships with African universities, backed by Horizon Europe equipment credit lines for shared facilities.
5. Make eligibility for selected Pillar II thematic clusters conditional on meaningful African partnership - mirroring the existing gender and open-science criteria.

6. Fund competitive Bridge Chairs for African diaspora scientists already based in Europe to mentor incoming U.S. researchers on African collaboration networks.
7. Scale up the AU-EU Intellectual Property Rights workshop series into a permanent help-desk so transatlantic consortia can navigate African IP, standards and data-protection rules from day one.
8. Task the Joint Research Centre with publishing an annual scorecard on African research institutes most capable of hosting top-tier scientists; link EU funding top-ups to improvements on that index.
9. Offer matching funds for African governments that guarantee tenure-track posts or start-up capital for scientists completing EU-based fellowships, answering the Agenda's call for "conducive support infrastructures for scholars returning to Africa".

Conclusion

Europe cannot credibly market itself as the world's sanctuary for free inquiry if its open doors end at the Mediterranean. By hard-wiring African mobility, funding and infrastructure into the Choose Europe package, Brussels can transform a narrow talent-grab into a strategic win for two continents—and show Washington what a truly global science policy looks like.

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