Official Journal
of the European Union

EN
C series

C/2025/769

11.2.2025

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee

Water Politics: Empowering Youth, Women, and Indigenous and Local Communities

(own-initiative opinion)

(C/2025/769)

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Plenary Assembly decision	18.1.2024
Legal basis	Rule 52(2) of the Rules of Procedure
Section responsible	External Relations
Adopted in section	12.11.2024
Adopted at plenary session	4.12.2024
Plenary session No	592
Outcome of vote (for/against/abstentions)	189/2/6

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1. Following up on the EESC opinion on blue diplomacy ([1]), this document zooms in on young people, women, and indigenous and local communities (including migrants and people with disabilities), as these population groups are some of the most vulnerable to water stress. On the other hand, they have a large untapped potential for contributing to sustainable water management, for turning water into an instrument of peace and stability, and, thus, contributing to blue diplomacy.

1.2. Inspired by the call for a global Europe that leverages the power of partnerships ([2]) and welcoming the appointment of EU Commissioner for Environment, Water Resilience and a Competitive Circular Economy, the EESC calls on the EU to pay due attention to these groups in its external relations and international cooperation and suggests a ***lighthouse partnership programme for addressing how to empower them in an integrated manner***, as described in greater detail in point 4.4 below.

1.3. Access to clean water, education, employment and participation in policymaking are key elements of empowerment. Better access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services is crucial, as it frees up time for education and vocational training and opens up more diverse options for employment and the ability to contribute to water management and policies. New technologies coupled with indigenous knowledge – used and applied in a respectful manner – and adequate focused funding are necessary enablers of empowerment, while international human rights, labour, anti-corruption and environmental conventions provide the legal framework for this. Information campaigns on water issues also contribute to empowerment.

([1]) OJ C, C/2023/862, 8.12.2023, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/862/oj.
([2]) Ms von der Leyen Political Guidelines, July 2024.

1.4. Youth empowerment requires a positive outlook for the future in terms of education and employment, starting from primary education, and extending to vocational training and higher education. Besides water-related competences, young people should be provided with general civic, citizenship and entrepreneurial skills, so that they can contribute to water management, employment and policymaking, as today's drivers of change and future decision-makers ([3]). In some communities, such as indigenous ones, young people are tasked with leadership by their communities and lessons can be drawn from their experience.

1.5. Proper WASH services are fundamental for women's empowerment, considering that in most of the heavily water-stressed areas, women and young girls are burdened with finding solutions at the expense of their education, training, employment opportunities and personal development. Fully-fledged gender equality in education, work, authorities and entrepreneurship is another vital factor. Due attention needs to be paid to decent working conditions, including the prevention of discrimination and harassment. To enable women's entrepreneurship, it is necessary to provide equal access to infrastructure, land and finance and to establish corruption-free business conditions. Women should also be encouraged and supported to hold leading positions in politics and business, and in any organisations contributing to water management and blue diplomacy.

1.6. Concrete platforms for meaningful dialogue between indigenous groups and national or local governments are necessary, alongside a more proactive, systematic involvement of indigenous people in international cooperation processes. Local communities must be provided with access to infrastructure, information, education and training, while local-level civil society organisations (CSOs) should be involved in local policymaking processes, engaging and empowering the indigenous groups ([4]).

1.7. Blue and digital technologies are instrumental for improving water management and access to clean water and sanitation. Due to the critical nature of – and interconnections between – water, energy and digital systems, infrastructure needs to be developed in its entirety. Source protection, wetlands preservation ([5]), prevention and control of pollution, and bio-contamination are vital for sustainable water management. Many indigenous groups, continue to apply strong ethics of water stewardship and their engagement is critical for meeting growing water challenges.

1.8. Meaningful partnership and funding are critical in the development of infrastructure, education and general capacity building. Both EU funds and national donors' programmes play a crucial role here and coordination is vital to create synergies and make the most of the allocated resources. It is important to exchange good practices and to provide incentives for donors' programs to stay in the water sector, and to also encompass rivers, lakes and other wetland ecosystems, as these are critical water resources. It is also necessary to map and monitor the use of funds and to ensure that funding is effective and supports the empowerment of vulnerable groups.

2. **General context and scope**

2.1. This own-initiative opinion is a follow-up to the EESC opinion on blue diplomacy ([6]) and builds on its central role in the EESC's initiative calling on the EU to focus on water as growingly scarce resource with key importance for the global future and to promote a Blue Deal to increase water-related security, resilience and sustainability, both within the EU and worldwide ([7]).

([3]) For example, European Citizens' Initiative for a Water-Smart and Resilient Europe: https://citizens-initiative.europa.eu/initiatives/details/2024/000010_en.
([4]) UWASNET in Uganda is a good example - https://uwasnet.org/.
([5]) The Convention on Wetlands, created in 1971 and joined by 172 countries across the world, also contributes to vulnerable groups empowerment: https://www.ramsar.org/news/empowering-women-restoring-wetlands-go-hand-hand.
([6]) OJ C, C/2023/862, 8.12.2023, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/862/oj.
([7]) OJ C, C/2024/878, 6.2.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/878/oj.

2.2. Water is crucial to human life and dignity, with the UN recognising access to water and sanitation as a fundamental human right. Protecting rivers, lakes, wetlands and aquifers ([8]), and securing adequate, accessible and affordable WASH services are imperative for public health and human development. However, global water stress, problems and risks are increasing due to the unsustainable management of water resources, the climate crisis and the soaring population as a result of high birth rates or migration from other countries. In view of these developments, water has emerged as a critical strategic asset.

2.3. Water politics cannot be considered in isolation, given that water is an intrinsic part of food, energy and industrial production, and is intertwined with health, climate, biodiversity and other environment-related issues. Moreover, it has prominent gender, intergenerational and intercultural dimensions. Water is vital: without it, there is no life. It is an indispensable component of all the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Agenda 2030. Water politics should thus be considered not only as a policy field of its own, but also as a horizontal dimension to be integrated into all policies, as requested in Principle 1 of the EESC Declaration for an EU Blue Deal ([9]). We all need to care before water becomes rare.

2.4. Young people, women, and indigenous and local communities (including migrants and people with disabilities) are among the most vulnerable to water stress and often suffer the most in water stress hotspots. Hence, these groups must receive greater attention in new water strategies and policies and international cooperation, to ensure an adequate, accessible and affordable clean water supply and WASH services, a sustainable water management healthy living environment and consequent social development for all. On the other hand, these groups have a large untapped potential for contributing to sustainable water management and water-related conflict prevention and resolution, based on their experience, practices and approaches to land stewardship. They can serve as crucial players and agents and should be recognised on both decision-making and operational levels.

2.5. While there are significant water stress hotspots within EU borders, the broad and serious nature of global water stresses and related tensions and conflicts requires global thinking, action and solutions implemented through international cooperation. This is particularly important in the case of transboundary water bodies and shared water resources, so that water can turn into an instrument of peace rather than of conflict.

2.6. Water-related problems overseas strongly affect the EU, directly or indirectly and offer a strong incentive for active blue diplomacy through its external relations, including international partnerships and multilateral cooperation within the UN system (e.g. FAO, WHO, UNESCO, ILO, UNIDO, UNDP).

2.7. Specific efforts are needed to tackle the severe water scarcity in large parts of sub-Saharan Africa, not only because this is an alarming situation that well reflects global challenges but also because problemsthat Africa faces will sooner or later reach the gates of the EU. For example, water scarcity and related conflicts are likely to generate massive migration flows from Africa to the EU, while significant migration flows can also impact exisiting water-stress areas in Africa and in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, thus amplifying the pressure. This highlights the complexity of climate- and water-induced migration and requires the EU to address it timely and proactively.

2.8. The EESC underlines the fact that water challenges are broad, diverse and complex in nature. Drought is also a growing problem for multiple regions, including the Middle East, Central Asia and Latin America. At the same time, the increasing irregularity of rainfalls poses additional challenges, Many countries in Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as certain island countries, are exposed to frequent flooding that is life-changing in its scale. It is a vital public responsibility to provide those affected with early warnings and urgent response practices, making the best use of the new technologies for saving lives and for helping exposed communities to survive.

([8]) The Convention on Wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of all wetlands and their resources. The term 'wetlands' here encompasses rivers, lakes, peatlands, ponds, marshes and all coastal wetlands. See https://www.ramsar.org/.

([9]) https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/initiatives/eu-blue-deal.

2.9. The deteriorating quality of water is an increasingly important problem, as it endangers the source of living for local communities in many areas. Transboundary water bodies, rivers, lakes and aquifers often carry pollutants from one country or region to another, caused also by lack of knowledge and infrastructure, which not only affects numerous people's living conditions but also causes tensions between countries.

3. **Recognising the needs and potential of youth, women, indigenous and local communities (including migrants and people with disabilities)**

3.1. ***Key elements and enablers of empowerment***

3.1.1. The means for protecting vulnerable groups, improving their living conditions in water-stress areas, and further unleashing their potential to act and influence are similar across all groups. The key elements include access to clean water and sanitation, awareness raising, education and training for improving participation in labour market and employment, safe spaces created for knowledge exchange, and participation in policymaking, all enabled and supported by new technologies, adequate funding and appropriate rules.

3.1.2. Proper access to WASH services provides more opportunities for a better life by preventing poor hygiene and water source contamination and by improving access to clean drinking water. This applies to women and young girls in particular, as they usually bear the burden of finding solutions to water-related issues due to tradition and social norms. Also, in many water stress areas a large proportion of women and young people work in agriculture in areas suffering from water scarcity.

3.1.3. Education and skills development are other essential elements of empowerment. While proper access to water frees up time for education, education increases the ability to contribute to sustainable water management and leadership and creates more diverse options for employment. A broad set of education and training opportunities must be available to respond to the need for water-related skills, from basic skills to high level professional competences, depending on circumstances and ambition, thus also ensuring EU leadership in water-efficient technologies. In addition to formal education, role-modelling should be encouraged, peer-to-peer networks strengthened and deeper learning mentored by enabling the transfer and exchange of knowledge and experience.

3.1.4. Vulnerable groups should not, however, just be viewed as the target of education and training efforts. These groups have specific skills, knowledge and experience that can help improve water management and policymaking. This amplifies the importance of involving them in policy planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation processes. To this end, decision-making structures need to enable true and effective interaction and involvement that is inclusive of diverse voices, beyond mere top-down information or one-sided bottom-up consultation.

3.1.5. The participation of these groups in water diplomacy has mainly taken place through connections between civil society actors. It is important to further strengthen this kind of Track II ([10]) blue diplomacy, but at the same time connect local voices with Track I ([11]) government-level diplomacy. This can ensure that the voices of vulnerable groups are actually being heard, their interests being considered, and their potential tapped.

3.1.6. New technologies provide new impetus, both for improving water management and for empowering vulnerable groups. Innovative blue technologies offer new means to develop water supplies, prevent water scarcity and pollution and prepare for water-related risks, including climate-change-induced extreme weather conditions. Digital technologies are an essential part of these solutions, and their uptake also provides more inclusive approaches to education, communication and

([10]) Track II diplomacy is the practice of non-state players using conflict resolution tactics (such as workshops and conversations) to lessen 'the anger or tension or fear that exists' between conflicting groups. These 'non-governmental, informal and unofficial contacts' host activities like workshops and conversations to improve communication and understanding between members of the public.

([11]) Track I diplomacy is usually considered to be the primary peace-making tool of a state's foreign policy. It is carried out by diplomats, high-ranking government officials and heads of state, and is aimed at influencing political power structures.

participation. As electrification is a basic requirement, such as for water distribution and digital connections, water, energy and digital infrastructure must be developed together for achieving Water Smart Society ([12]). Information campaigns for sustainable water use and source protection and developing water-smart models can further facilitate integrated water solutions.

3.1.7. Meaningful partnerships and related funding play a crucial role in the development of water related infrastructure, education, training and in general capacity building. Access to finance is also a prerequisite for entrepreneurship and business development. In addition to EU funds, national agencies and funding for international development cooperation play a key role here; close coordination creates synergies and helps achieve better results. It is vital to exchange good practices and incentivise national donors' programmes to better connect to local needs. It is also necessary to map and monitor the use of funds and to ensure that funding is effective and supports the empowerment of vulnerable groups, including through water supply, education, and awareness raising about water issues such as the need for sanitation and pollution prevention.

3.1.8. International human rights, labour, anti-corruption and environmental conventions provide the legal framework for protecting and empowering vulnerable and underrepresented groups in water issues. More efforts need to focus on the implementation of these rules in all countries and projects. It is also important to raise awareness about water related rights and opportunities among the vulnerable groups themselves while fighting biased stereotypes and propaganda.

3.2. *Unleashing the potential of youth*

3.2.1. Of today's global population of eight billion people, around 1.8 billion are between the ages of 10 and 24, and this number is increasing ([13]). Given that the vast majority of this group live in emerging market countries, making up a large proportion of their populations, young people are of crucial importance as both targets and actors in water politics. Improving their opportunities calls for a wide range of measures, as indicated by, for example, the initiative to help Uganda's young people raise their standards of education and training, and have access to food and water in order to secure a new generation inspired by faith, hope and love, transforming their communities ([14]).

3.2.2. Growth in population means an increase in pressure on water resources and the need to identify both existing and future risks to water sources. This highlights the need to improve the knowledge, understanding and skills related to access to water sources and their protection, and consequently the importance of sustainable water management. While young people expect proper living conditions and an outlook for a positive future in terms of professions and jobs, they are also willing to contribute to the positive development and resilience of their communities and countries. They are often agents for change and drivers of economic, social and environmental progress.

3.2.3. With respect to policymaking, young people have the potential to challenge existing structures and procedures and bring novel ideas, if given the opportunity. They can also help suggest innovative solutions for WASH services and water management. Moreover, they are able and willing to network across borders, and thus strengthen international cooperation.

3.2.4. However, there are several obstacles to the active engagement of young people in water-related activities and governance, such as:

— Uninclusive and non-representative structures – young people are often excluded from the decision-making processes, and whenever they are included, their opinions are often disregarded;

— Knowledge and skills barriers – water issues often require specific knowledge and technical expertise;

— Language barriers in international cooperation;

— Limited opportunities for capacity building;

— Fragmentation of youth initiatives and movements.

([12]) OJ C, C/2024/878, 6.2.2024, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/878/oj.
([13]) 10 things you didn't know about the world's population - Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth (un.org).
([14]) https://fieldsoflife.org/why-east-africa/.

3.2.5. To overcome these and other obstacles, young people need education and training opportunities, starting at a very early age. This requires sufficient resources in terms of teachers available in local communities and distance schooling facilities. It also requires opportunities for young people, and particularly young girls and women, to be able to access vocational training and higher education. There should be a focus on youth-specific educational programmes that incorporate sustainable water management and diplomacy into their curriculum, ensuring that the next generation is aware of present and future water challenges and well-prepared to address them. To secure a broader impact, digital tools and platforms should be leveraged to boost the involvement of young people in remote mountainous, island and other under-served areas, providing them with access to education, training and policy-making forums.

3.2.6. Besides water-related competences, young people should be provided with general civic and citizenship skills in order to be better able to influence and participate effectively in water management and policymaking. Civic education is also necessary from the point of view of preparing for the future, considering that young people are the leaders of tomorrow and help them be part of the public policy of today ([15]). They should also be provided with entrepreneurial skills and encouraged and supported to establish businesses, thus contributing to employment.

3.3. ***Empowering women***

3.3.1. Around the world, it is primarily women and girls that are exposed to water stress ([16]), as they traditionally bear the main burden of collecting water. Figures show that:

— as those responsible for 72 percent of daily household water supplies ([17]), every day, women around the world spend a total of 200 million hours collecting water ([18]);

— the average water load amounts to 30 kg of water carried every day – often in multiple trips to a source and back ([19]);

— young girls (under 15 years old) are twice as likely to be responsible for collecting water for the household as boys are, exposing them to attacks and preventing them from attending school and acquiring valuable skills ([20]);

— while walking many kilometres searching for water across long distances in isolated and unsafe spots and then waiting in long queues, women are likely to experience harassment.

3.3.2. There is scientific evidence that better access to WASH services allows women to take greater control over their lives at personal, household and community levels, which in turn uplifts communities, by:

— enabling women to irrigate and grow crops and provide more food for themselves and their families;

— freeing women from the obligation to invest time and effort in collecting water, thus enabling them to engage in other activities, such as education, training, entrepreneurship, jobs, culture, personal development and leadership, which subsequentially boosts their potential to increase their income;

— improving reproductive health and childcare;

— contributing to higher GDP.

([15]) One excellent example is the UfM Water and Youth Engagement Strategy. In keeping with the core principles of empowering young people in sustainable water management, it offers a valuable framework for increasing youth participation in water-related governance and decision-making processes. This strategy emphasises the need for tailored capacity-building initiatives and youth-led projects, which are critical for fostering innovation and ensuring that young people are not just participants, but also leaders, in the water sector. The strategy advocates the integration of young peoples' viewpoints at both local and international levels.

([16]) OJ C 349, 29.9.2023, p. 60.

([17]) UN Women.

([18]) *Collecting water is often a colossal waste of time for women and girls*, UNICEF.

([19]) FAO.

([20]) UNICEF.

3.3.3. To free women and girls from focusing solely on fulfilling the basic needs of their families in water-stress areas and to ensure better protection of water sources, more advanced water and wastewater management systems are of fundamental importance.

3.3.4. Access to education and various learning opportunities constitute another pillar for empowering women in water affairs. Proper attention also needs to be paid to diversified working opportunities and decent working conditions for women, including the prevention of discrimination, harassment and any kind of mistreatment. Moreover, women should be provided with full possibilities for entrepreneurship. Besides education, this requires legally allowed access to infrastructure, land, natural resources and finance. Microfinance can be a valuable tool in that respect.

3.3.5. Equal opportunities for education, training, work and entrepreneurship are part of ensuring better gender equality in general, which is often challenging, as it relates to culture and community attitudes. It is therefore vital to raise awareness of the benefits of gender equality, as well as identifying structural obstacles to it.

3.3.6. While gender equality is a human rights issue, it is also essential for unleashing the full potential of populations to enhance economic, social and environmental progress. As women are often responsible for ensuring that everyday activities run smoothly and that different needs and resources are compatible with one other, they have good starting points for the sustainable management of water resources and blue diplomacy and for ensuring that a wider set of values are included in decisions that affect water. This applies to both practical-level water management and political-level decision-making and diplomacy ([21]). Women should therefore be encouraged and supported to seek a career in this field.

3.3.7. Women should be allowed access to leading positions, and be encouraged to acquire technical and legal expertise and leadership skills to unleash their potential in politics, business, the third sector and any other organisation that contributes to sustainable water management and blue diplomacy. Hence, specific mentorship programmes for women in water management should be established to ensure their access to leadership opportunities and foster their participation in decision-making processes at all levels. In addition, it is important to support women's self-confidence and career development, including through networking at all levels, from local to international. Existing examples are the Women in Water Diplomacy network in the Nile region and the Women in Water Management network in Central Asia and Afghanistan. These networks are a community of practice; the overarching goal of Women in Water Diplomacy is women's empowerment and leadership in high-level decision-making in transboundary river basins.

3.4. *Engaging indigenous and local communities (including migrants and people with disabilities)*

3.4.1. Indigenous people account for 5 percent of the world's population, and they occupy, own or manage approximately 20-25 percent of the earth's land surface ([22]). Indigenous territories include many critical sources of water, such as water towers, wetlands and rivers that they have stewarded for millennia, often unrecognised by those who have benefited from such efforts. They are among the first to face water-related problems due to their wide-ranging reliance on natural resources and ecosystems. They are especially vulnerable to the effects of water risks in food security, such as the effects on fisheries, hunting and grazing opportunities for livestock. These problems are often related to droughts or floods, while in the Arctic area, the possibilities for hunting are limited by the climate-change-induced melting of ice, which prevents moving around on ice.

([21]) Two concrete examples are: 1) the comparative study on Empowering Women in Water Diplomacy in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), led by the Geneva Water Hub and GWP-Med: this highlights the critical role women play in water diplomacy in the MENA region. The study provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities for women's empowerment in this field, underscoring the need for targeted intervention to support women's leadership in water management and diplomacy; 2) the work programme on Gender and wetlands, The Convention on Wetlands (ramsar.org).

([22]) https://siwi.org/publications/indigenous-people-water-and-climate-change/.

3.4.2. Indigenous women often encounter additional problems due to their ethnic origin, gender or indigenous identity. This manifests itself as harassment, violence, discrimination at work, and a lack of political and judicial rights, including land ownership and access to natural resources ([23]). Despite this, in many communities indigenous women are the keepers of water knowledge, and their meaningful inclusion is critical.

3.4.3. Indigenous people usually have a long-lasting, deep relationship with water, land and wetlands, and a unique knowledge of how to preserve, protect and use these resources in a sustainable way, often in association with their own obligations to protect the land as part of their relationship with their regions. For example, in the Peruvian Andes, indigenous communities plant a large number of seedlings of fast-growing and resistant Queuña trees on the steep mountain slopes to prevent erosion and to store and filter the water that feeds springs and wetlands downstream ([24]). The knowledge of indigenous people, which they transfer across generations and often through oral traditions, must be seen as a source of inspiration to be explored and used through meaningful partnerships in many contexts, including in water diplomacy.

3.4.4. On the other hand, it is essential to enhance protection of the intellectual property rights of indigenous people and local communities that relate to traditional knowledge and expressions. This applies to tradition-based inventions, cultural expressions, product design, recipes and the geographical origin of goods and services ([25]).

3.4.5. Despite recent advances, there is an obvious need for proactive platforms for meaningful engagement between indigenous groups and national and local governments, and also with the international community, regarding practice around water. Proper dialogue based on shared interests and agreement is essential in order to build long-term relationships, deeper trust and mutual respect between governments and indigenous communities, including women and young people. Decisions on the international level often do not consider indigenous peoples' perspectives, knowledge or solutions. Systematically involving indigenous people in international cooperation is thus also needed to ensure that their human rights are respected, and that the potential of these groups is fully explored.

3.4.6. Any local communities in any region must be provided access to infrastructure, information and education. Practical solutions should, however, take due account of local conditions and the level of development, as the needs and possibilities of people living in mountainous areas, islands and small and isolated villages without proper access to water are highly different from those in more developed areas, and each context will demand contextually appropriate solutions. Given that local level CSOs often play an important role in water related issues and in helping vulnerable groups, they should be involved in local policymaking processes.

4. **Partnership opportunities for the EU**

4.1. The EU plays a central role in addressing global water stress through its external relations and international partnerships, complemented by national donor programmes. Based on its advanced legal framework, technological capacity and major role as a donor in this field, the EU can contribute widely to the sustainable management of water resources, access to water and sanitation, education and training, water governance and conflict resolution. In this context, the EU can also make use of its experience in enhancing gender equality and participatory policy-making, including youth engagement, and provide guidance here. Microfinance tools to the benefit of affected groups could be of great relevance in that respect.

4.2. Sub-Saharan Africa has emerged as a focal point for blue diplomacy due to its special demographic, geographic and political conditions. As Africa's destabilisation due to water stress is likely to spill over into the MENA region and the EU, and lead to food and migration crises, Europe's proactive stance is a *sine qua non*. Lake Victoria, Lake Chad and the Nile, Niger and Congo river basins are water-stress hotspots, requiring urgent attention in order to protect the environment and prevent climate and water disasters that could trigger new conflicts and migration waves towards Europe.

([23]) Indigenous women's realities: Insights from the Indigenous Navigator, IWGIA and ILO, 2020.
([24]) https://library.panos.co.uk/features/stories/seeds-of-water.html#0_00337302.
([25]) https://www.wipo.int/sme/en/traditional-knowledge.html.

4.3. Within the framework of Global Gateway ([26]) and the EU's economic security strategy ([27]), Africa is a key partner of the EU. Given that other global powers, notably China and India, are actively securing a foothold in Africa, cooperation with Africa is without doubt a matter of utmost importance for the EU's economic and geopolitical security and global strategic position. It is thus imperative that the EU develop a comprehensive Africa strategy, of which blue diplomacy will be an indispensable part.

4.4. In light of the challenges in water-stress areas, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, and the risks and opportunities they entail for the EU, the EESC recommends that **a lighthouse partnership programme** be established for at least one case area in Africa, to cover the various elements of empowerment in an integrated manner. The EESC suggests that the following measures be included in the programme:

4.4.1. Cooperating and supporting the development of water and wastewater **infrastructure** and related services, in order to improve access to WASH services, with a special emphasis on sustainability, environmental impat and restoration efforts.

4.4.2. Supporting local education and training capacity-building, facilitating student exchanges with the EU and promoting EU talent pool opportunities, while avoiding brain drain and promoting circular migration ([28]) in order to enhance the **competences and skills** needed for sustainable water management and blue diplomacy. Specific efforts should focus on education for girls and women.

4.4.3. Cooperating on **blue technologies**, accompanied by the necessary electricity technologies, in order to help improve access to WASH services, water efficiency, pollution control and the security of a clean water supply. Local conditions should be properly considered in technology choices.

4.4.4. Enhancing conditions and capacities for creating local businesses in order to promote **entrepreneurship** and employment. Specific support should target young and female entrepreneurs.

4.4.5. Promoting the implementation of international labour conventions in order to ensure decent **working conditions**. Specific attention should be paid to upholding non-discrimination based on gender and ethnic origin and to respecting human rights.

4.4.6. Establishing cooperation with local policymakers and various groups, in order to enhance **participatory policymaking and blue diplomacy**. This multi-stakeholder interaction should aim to empower young people, women and indigenous people to prevent and solve water problems and conflicts.

4.4.7. Cooperating on the development of digital infrastructure and connections, in order to make use of the opportunities provided by **digitalisation** in water management, education and communication. This should be accompanied by efforts to develop local communities' digital skills.

4.4.8. Involving the **EU's civil society** in the programme, in order to enhance grassroots-level knowledge and experience-sharing. Full use should be made of current cooperation structures.

4.4.9. Allocating sufficient **funding** to the programme, including for the development of infrastructure, education, multi-stakeholder dialogue and business, in order to ensure that the above measures are implemented.

([26]) https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/global-gateway/opinions.
([27]) https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/european-economic-security-strategy.
([28]) OJ C 75, 28.2.2023, p. 136.

4.4.10. **Monitoring and assessing** the implementation and impact of the programme, with a view to upscaling it in the future. The main focus should be on the results regarding youth, women, and local and regional communities as both targets and actors in water management and politics.

Brussels, 4 December 2024.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
Oliver RÖPKE