

AU STRUCTURES AND RECS OVERVIEW

This research brief is part of the series compiled by the GCE Secretariat to disseminate and present findings and summarized information from the published report entitled, *“In Search for A Place in Implementing the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA)”*. The research was commissioned by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE) to understand how the African Union (AU) and its Regional Economic Communities (RECs) engage with the theme of education, and to identify what spaces and opportunities exist for civil society education groups in Africa to interact with those bodies in the service of more equitable and democratic public education systems on the continent. This brief specifically presents research finding and shares information on the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Committees (RECs), which form part of the Union’s overall structure. The [Arab Maghreb Union](#) (AMU), the REC in the Northern part of the African continent¹, is not included in the research, as the focus is in on sub-Saharan Africa.

Background - The African Union (AU)

The African Union (AU) is the continental body consisting of the 55 member states that make up the countries of the African Continent. It was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, 1963-1999), which was established as “Africa’s first post-independence continental institution” and “the manifestation of the pan-African vision for an Africa that was united, free and in control of its own destiny”.

The emphasis in the new Union was on increased cooperation and integration to drive Africa’s growth and economic development. The guiding vision was summed up as “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena”. This vision included aspirations to achieve the human rights of African people, promoting sustainable development, and progress on women’s participation and gender equality.

The grand vision of the AU is contained in the **Africa We Want** document, known as [Agenda 2063](#). This is the strategic framework for Africa’s long term socio-economic and integrative transformation, which calls for greater collaboration and support for African-led initiatives to ensure the achievement of the aspirations of African people. The Continental Education Strategy (CESA) is the education component of Agenda 2063.

Key Findings

1. The purpose of the RECs is to facilitate regional economic integration between members of the individual regions and through the wider African Economic Community (AEC).
2. Defining AU-REC relations is still a work in progress.
3. Coordination Meetings take place annually for RECs to report the status of regional implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of continental policies, programs, and projects, with the participation of the Chairpersons of the RECs, the AUC, and Regional Mechanisms (RMs).
4. RECs are part of the CESA implementation structure and should be playing a key role in supporting countries in their region to implement the CESA framework even though in practice they do not participate in CESA clusters and their engagement with CESA appears to be weak.

¹ The Arab Maghreb Union is recognized by the AU as one of the eight regional economic communities (RECs). The AMU was established in 1989 but quickly fell into paralysis as a result of the Moroccan – Algerian dispute over the status of Western Sahara. The Heads of State of the AMU member states last met in 1994. See: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/the-maghreb-regional-disintegration-and-the-risks-of-the-zero-sum-logic-132041> and <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1774881>

African Union Structures and Functions

The work of the AU is implemented through several decision-making organs:

The Assembly	The supreme policy and decision-making organ. Composed of all Member State Heads of State and Government.
Executive Council	Coordinates and takes decisions on policies in areas of common interest to Member States. It is responsible to the Assembly. Composed of foreign ministers or such other ministers or authorities as are designated by the governments of Member States.
Specialised Technical Committees (STCs)	The Specialized Technical Committees (STCs) are thematic committees on key AU projects and programs. STCs are responsible to the Executive Council. Composed of Member State ministers or senior officials.
Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC)	The Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC) is charged with preparing the work of the Executive Council. Composed of Permanent Representatives and other plenipotentiaries of Member States.
Peace & Security Council (PSC)	The AU's organ for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. Composed of 15 elected Member States.
African Union Commission (AUC)	The AU's secretariat. Composed of a Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and six commissioners as well as staff.
Pan-African Parliament (PAP)	Platform for people from all African states to participate in discussions and decision-making on issues facing the continent. Members are designated by the legislatures of their Member States.
Economic, Social & Cultural Council (ECOSOCC)	Advisory organ that provides opportunity for African civil society organizations to contribute to the AU's principles, policies and programs. Composed of social and professional groups from AU Member States.
Judicial, Human Rights & Legal Organs	Organs are the: African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights (AfCHPR), AU Commission on International Law (AUCIL), AU Advisory Board on Corruption (AUABC) and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC).
Financial Institutions	Proposed institutions are the: African Central Bank, African Investment Bank and the African Monetary Fund.
African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)	Aims to foster the adoption of policies, values, standards and practices of political and economic governance that lead to political stability, accelerated economic integration, economic growth and sustainable development.
Regional Economic Communities (RECs)	The RECs are regional groupings of African states that facilitate regional economic integration between members and through the wider African Economic Community (AEC). The RMs for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution are part of the overall security architecture of the Union.

Relationship between the AU and RECs

Regional Economic Communities (RECs) are considered as the building blocks of African integration. There are eight RECs recognized by the AU. The rationale for RECs lies in the choice of a gradual integration process by African countries. The principle of subsidiarity is at the core of AU-REC relations, whereby regional structures can take the lead in situations occurring in their region or under their political jurisdiction.

As per the decision of the AU Summit in 2017, a coordination meeting should take place every year with the RECs, with the participation of the Chairpersons of the RECs, the AUC, and Regional Mechanisms (RMs). The primary objective of the Coordination Meeting amongst other objectives is to review the status of continental integration and coordinate efforts to accelerate the integration process.

The RECs should report annually to the AU-REC Coordination Meeting on the status of regional implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of continental policies, programs, and projects.

Member states are ultimately in charge of implementing continental or regional policies and programs, as well as ensuring the implementation of AU legal instruments at the national level. They should provide sound and accurate national data on the implementation of continental and regional policies, as agreed in the AU-RECs-member states coordination arrangement.

Coordination and Monitoring

The [first AU-REC Coordination Meeting](#), held in 2019, focused on three key areas:

- (i) Division of labor between the AU, RECs and AU member states;
- (ii) The first African Regional Integration Report; and
- (iii) The draft protocol amending the 2008 protocol on AU-REC relations.

Under the agreed [division of labor](#), six main technical areas were discussed: policy planning and formulation; policy adoption; implementation; monitoring and information; partnerships; and joint resource mobilization.

Of these areas, unsurprisingly, implementation and monitoring and evaluation are seen as the continent's weakest points. To address those weaknesses, the AU Commission (AUC) proposed the organization of annual consultations between AU organs and RECs.

The [African Integration Report](#), the first edition of which came out in 2021, following up on the African [Regional Integration Index](#) of 2019, both offer some detailed information on how integration is viewed and assessed.

RECs Education Engagement

In the education field, RECs are part of the CESA implementation structure and should be playing a key role in supporting countries in their region to implement CESA objectives and goals. In practice, RECs do not participate in CESA clusters and their engagement with CESA appears to be weak. While further analysis is necessary on this issue, one possible explanation is that RECs do not see the general CESA framework addressing their priorities and opting therefore to focus on negotiating and developing joint frameworks that have immediate results for their member countries, such as harmonization of standards and qualifications in the East African Community (ECA) to facilitate the mobility of graduates and teachers.

The Coordination meetings are continuing to consider and adopt effective division of labour between the AU, RECs/RMs and Member States in the different sectors. However, it remains unclear on whether Education, Science and Technology (EST) has been one of the covered sectors. The meeting usually also includes discussions on the AU's chosen theme for the given year and 2024 is the Year of Education. This will be an opportunity for CSOs and education groups to seek detailed information on the preparation of the 2024 AU-REC Coordination Meeting and to be propositional toward it, with an eye to strengthening REC engagement with the theme and utilizing openings to engage with the RECs around those issues.