

AU-EU YOUTH ACTION LAB COHORT 1 GRANTEES ADVOCACY STATEMENT ON MEANINGFUL YOUTH INCLUSION AND DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

(An outcome of the Link and Learn Event held in Bishoftu, Ethiopia in 8 – 10, December, 2025)

Executive Message from Young People

We, youth-led organisations and youth leaders from Africa and Europe, came together at the inaugural **AU-EU Youth Action Lab - Link and Learn Event 2025** to reflect, learn, and collectively shape our advocacy priorities. Representing almost 40 youth organisations from 17 countries and diverse thematic, cultural, and social backgrounds, we speak with a shared conviction: **young people are not only the future - but we are also active contributors to governance, development, and social transformation TODAY.**

This statement is the result of a participatory, peer-driven process grounded in lived experience, evidence, and collective reflection. It reflects our realities as youth leaders navigating shrinking civic space, constrained funding environments, and exclusion from decision-making, while continuing to build solutions rooted in collaboration, inclusion, and resilience.

We present this statement as a collective call to decision-makers in Africa and Europe to recognize youth as partners, invest in youth-led ecosystems, and institutionalise meaningful youth participation across all levels of governance and development.

Background and Co-Creation Process

The **Link and Learn 2025 event** marked the first annual gathering of AU-EU Youth Action Lab grantees. Hosted by TaYA (the specialised Link and Learn grantee based in Ethiopia), the convening provided a safe and inclusive space for peer learning, cross-regional exchange, and joint advocacy agenda setting.

Over three days, participants engaged in highly participatory methodologies including world tours, fishbowl discussions, storytelling, skills-building sessions, and creative reflection spaces. The process culminated in collective advocacy agenda development, where youth jointly identified shared challenges, mapped power structures, and articulated priorities for action.

This statement is not an individual position paper. It is a collectively owned outcome, shaped through consensus, reflection, and collaboration among youth-led organizations committed to long-term impact.

Context: Key Challenges faced by Young People in Africa and Europe

Across regions and thematic areas, participants identified common structural and systemic challenges affecting young people and youth-led organisations:

- ✓ Limited meaningful youth participation in policy formulation, governance, and decision-making spaces, despite commitments at national, regional, and global levels.
- ✓ Shrinking and rigid funding landscapes, characterised by exclusionary donor requirements, bureaucratic delays, and short-term project cycles that undermine sustainability.
- ✓ Governance and leadership gaps within youth-led organisations, including centralized leadership models, lack of documented policies, and weak succession planning.

These challenges are not isolated. They are interconnected and require systemic, coordinated responses.

Youth-led Advocacy Priorities

Based on collective analysis and reflection, the following two shared advocacy priorities have been identified by youth-led organisations:

1. Institutionalise Meaningful and Inclusive Youth Participation

Why this matters:

Young people continue to be excluded from spaces where decisions affecting their lives are made. Limited funding and shrinking civic space further restrict youth-led organisations' ability to organise, engage, and participate safely and effectively.

We call for:

- ✓ Youth participation through formal mechanisms such as mandatory decision-making youth seats, co-drafting of policies, and obligatory consultations integrated into policy and budgeting processes at all levels.
- ✓ Recognition of youth-led organizations as legitimate stakeholders and implementation partners.
- ✓ Cross-regional youth exchange opportunities to strengthen legitimacy and shared priorities including eliminating structural mobility barriers such as rigid visa requirements for young people.
- ✓ Stronger focus on marginalised and underserved youth.
- ✓ Safe, inclusive spaces for youth engagement free from intimidation, violence, or political manipulation with protection for youth working in shrinking civic spaces.

2. Invest in Sustainable and Inclusive Youth-Led Organisations

Why this matters:

Youth-led organisations are essential drivers of innovation and community-based solutions, yet remain under-resourced. Bureaucratic funding mechanisms - including complex application procedures, rigid compliance requirements, and heavy reporting burdens - often exclude smaller and emerging youth-led actors. As a result, youth impact is constrained not by lack of ideas, but by structural barriers to accessing sustainable and flexible funding.

We call for:

- ✓ Simplified funding models such as regranting that allow youth-led organisations/groups to mobilise funds without facing complex hurdles.
- ✓ Flexible funding models that respond to the diverse and evolving needs of youth-led organisations.
- ✓ Funding approaches that value learning, adaptation, and resilience through strong emphasis on capacity building in the areas of good governance, sustainability, intergenerational learning, and leadership succession.
- ✓ Prioritised long-term funding that allows youth organisations to build institutional memory, retain talent or ensure sustainability over short project funding cycles.
- ✓ Include funding mechanisms that encourage succession planning through leadership transition.

Call to action to decision-makers

We urge governments, regional institutions, development partners, and donors to:

- ✓ Commit to youth-responsive policies that are co-created, resourced, and monitored with young people.
- ✓ Allocate dedicated funding for youth-led initiatives and governance strengthening to be distributed with simplified funding mechanisms.
- ✓ Establish sustained partnerships with youth-led organizations as agents of change.
- ✓ Introduce a tracking system to measure youth participation and publish annual reports showing how youth have been involved in decision-making.
- ✓ Establish digital/non-digital platforms for monitoring youth engagement including complaint mechanisms on tokenism and exclusion.
- ✓ Maintain transparency and accountability on youth-dedicated funding.

Existing Political Commitments:

This advocacy statement is not a parallel agenda. It reinforces and operationalises existing political commitments made by African, European, and global institutions. Our priorities are firmly grounded in the following frameworks:

- ✓ Article 11, Article 12, Article 16 & 17 of the African Youth Charter.
- ✓ Aspiration 6 of the Agenda 2063.
- ✓ Direct alignment with the “Engage, Connect, Empower” pillars of the EU youth strategy 2019 – 2027.
- ✓ Priorities 1, 2, and 3 of the Youth Action Plan in EU external action.
- ✓ Sustainable Development Goals.

