

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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Youth Policies and Initiatives Are Key in the AU-EU Partnership

*Theresa, from Nigeria, and Roberta, from Germany, participate in the **AU-EU Youth Lab**. As we celebrate the 25th anniversary of the AU-EU unique partnership, we focus on the **key role it places for Youth policies and initiatives**. The upcoming EU-AU Ministerial meeting includes a **CSO-Youth Side Event taking place virtually on 20 May**.*

Tolulope Theresa Gbenro, a 24-year-old social impact consultant from Nigeria, is currently a Youth Advisory Board member at the AU-EU Youth Lab. She described it as “an exciting project to grant funds to youth-led activities in selected African countries and the EU”. **Roberta Bojang**, 25 years old, works for a German foundation and is an active member of the Diaspora. Her dearest experience from participating in the AU-EU Youth Lab was to witness the “talent, motivation, and high quality” of the applications, making her “feel super confident in how much our generation can achieve”. The common sentiment of Theresa and Roberta is that the AU-EU Youth Lab is a platform that empowers young people, namely by giving them the leading seat in co-creating and selecting supported projects. It also allows them to work together with the EU and AU, having space to voice opinions and be heard by policymakers. The EU and AU strongly support the building of a genuine people-to-people partnership from the grassroots with young people as active protagonists of such an endeavour. Watch their testimonies [here](#).

Theresa believes that youth should be central to decision-making as they make up more than 50% of the African population, and they need to be involved in creating policies and programs that affect their lives and prospects. For Roberta, this is one of the most interconnected generations to have existed. It is key to understanding the potential, allowing young people to play a crucial role in shaping our societies. They both highlight the importance of centering youth in policy dialogue and action.

The African Union and European Union agree. The AU-EU Partnership is committed to building a common future and fostering a prosperous Africa and Europe. Since 2000, the AU-EU partnership has provided a platform to engage in political and policy dialogues as

well as define the cooperative relationship between Africa and Europe. The Joint Vision for 2030 agreed by African and European leaders at their last [AU-EU Summit in 2022](#), guides the AU-EU Partnership to be a driving force in promoting our common priorities and shared values. These include sustainable and inclusive economic growth and the inclusion of young people, which is of critical consideration. As we celebrate the [25th anniversary of the unique AU-EU partnership](#), we place particular focus on the key role the partnership confers on youth policies and initiatives.

Recognizing the tremendous contributions of youth and Civil Society, the Joint Vision commits to invest in youth and to support their empowerment, education, skills, mobility, and employment prospects. This is done through learning exchanges, entrepreneurship promotion, decent job creation, and scaling up youth-owned businesses. Young people and Civil Society play a key role in areas such as migration and peace & security and are encouraged and given platforms to engage and contribute to decision-making processes within the Partnership. The inclusion of a virtual **CSO-Youth Side Event** at the upcoming **AU-EU Ministerial meeting on 21 May 2025** in Brussels is a testament to the [AU](#) and EU's dedication to amplifying youth voices at the highest level of decision-making.

Pursuant to AU and EU's Joint Vision, the **AU-EU Youth Lab** is a clear example of how both the AU and EU are jointly investing in youth empowerment. It uses participatory approaches to connect young people from different backgrounds from both continents. It contributes to youth empowerment and strengthens their involvement in active, meaningful and innovative ways. In this regard, young people are supported financially by grants in coordination with pilot dialogue and engagement mechanisms led by young peers.

Other joint AU-EU initiatives include the **AU-EU Innovation Agenda**, which is the main pillar of the cooperation on Science, Technology, and Innovation between Africa and Europe for the next decade. It increases the capacities and achievements of both European and African researchers and innovators, which will stimulate entrepreneurship and job creation among young graduates.

The flagship initiative on **Youth Mobility for Africa**, part of the Global Gateway Africa-Europe Investment Package, also promotes learning mobility opportunities within Africa and between Africa and the EU. It invests in youth human capital, boosts their employability, and fosters the conditions needed for academic and labour market mobility. It also promotes the inclusion and participation of young people as active members of societies in Africa and in Europe. The initiative contributes to the Youth Action Plan in EU External Action (2022-2027) and the commitments made at the 6th EU-AU Summit in 2022, supporting our common ambition for 2030 and the [AU's Agenda 2063](#). It further contributes to the implementation of the African Union-European Union Innovation Agenda, adopted in July 2023.

The Joint Vision to promote youth empowerment is not isolated. Rather, it is part of both institutions' steadfast commitment to harnessing young people's potential. Indeed, Aspiration 6 of AU's Agenda 2063 envisions “**An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.**” In efforts to ensure effective youth participation in the development process, the AU put in place the [African Youth Charter \(AYC\)](#), which provides a strategic framework for youth empowerment and development activities at the continental, regional, and national levels across Africa. Next year will mark the 20th anniversary, which provides an opportune moment to revitalize youth empowerment efforts on the continent. The AYC is complemented by other youth development initiatives such as the [1 Million Next Level](#) Initiative. The initiative seeks to catalyze action for youth development by providing young Africans with concrete opportunities in Health and Well-being, Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Engagement. One of the key principles of the 1 Million Next Level initiative calls for placing young people at the center of activities, prioritizing youth voices, acknowledging their diverse needs, and recognizing that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work.

Equally, the European Union supports young people in the EU and across the world in a variety of ways by engaging, empowering, and connecting them as outlined in the EU Youth Strategy and the Youth Action Plan in EU External Action (2022-2027). Following the European Year of Youth (2022-2023), it is committed to strengthening young people's voices in EU policymaking. An example is the **Youth Policy Dialogue on EU Foreign Policy** hosted by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy & EC Vice-President Kaja Kallas. The expanded **Erasmus+ Program** and cooperation between universities are other tools to improve our mutual understanding and to foster collaboration and learning excellence.

As we gear up for the upcoming **EU-AU Ministerial meeting on 21 May 2025, in Brussels**, which will include a virtual CSO-Youth Side Event taking place a day before, and the **7th AU-EU Summit** to be hosted in Africa later this year, Theresa and Roberta share suggestions. Theresa notes that if she was one of the new leaders at either [AU](#) and EU, she would drive meaningful youth engagement by focusing on “initiatives that employ and engage young people”. She would help them to be “meaningfully and appropriately employed”, on youth entrepreneurship initiatives and “releasing more funds to drive meaningful youth innovation.” Roberta would include “youth from the beginning until the end” when conceptualizing policies and projects and would ensure “youth have a permanent space as advisors” in policy. For her, it is key to increase youth diverse voices from various economic and academic backgrounds in policy design and implementation.

More information:

The African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) launched a [year-long celebration marking the 25th anniversary](#) of their enduring and unique partnership, since the first Africa-Europe Summit on 3-4 April 2000 in Cairo. In a looking back exercise, we recall key moments over the 25 years of cooperation, focused mainly on four pillars: Prosperity, Peace, People, and Planet. 2025 is another milestone with the African and European leaders meeting at the Ministerial format on May 21 in Brussels, and the heads of government at the Summit to be hosted in Africa.

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