

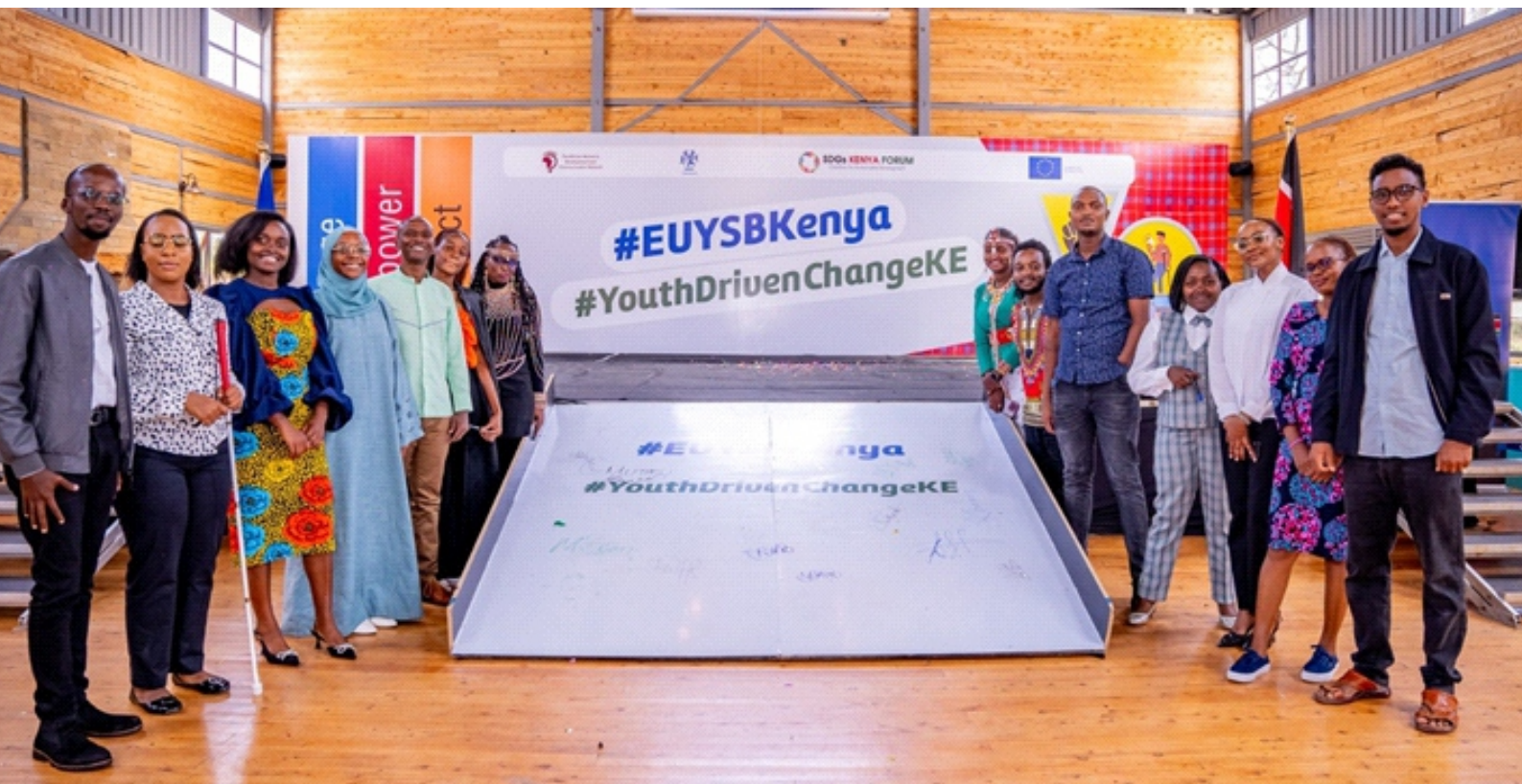
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# KENYAN YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS MISSION IN KENYA

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## 2025

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## List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
AfDB	African Development Bank
AUNYD	African United Nations Youth Delegate
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CLEWS	Climate, Land, Energy and Water Systems
CSO	Civil Society Organization
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FEMNET	African Women's Development and Communication Network
GoK	Government of Kenya
KII	Key Informant Interview
KIPPRA	Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
META	Meaningful Engagement and Transformative Action Program
NGEC	National Gender and Equality Commission
NIMD	Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TEI	Team Europe Initiative
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
WECF	Women Engage for a Common Future
YSB	Youth Sounding Board

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research evaluated Kenyan youth perceptions towards the European Union (EU) with emphasis on their role, credibility, and visibility in governance, peace-building, and youth empowerment given the rising levels of civic activism, such as the recent 2024 youth-led protests. This study aimed to evaluate how youth view projects sponsored by the EU, their participation levels, and their expectations in further collaboration between Kenyan youth and the Delegation of the European Union to Kenya.

This research took place in five counties: Nairobi, Kericho, Taita Taveta, Makueni, and Baringo between August 2025- February 2026. These five counties were chosen to encompass a wide range of geographical, economic, and digital environments. Mixed methodology was adapted for this study. A survey with 701 youth respondents via Kobo Collect and Google Forms and quantitative research techniques, FGDs and 10 KIIs with youth leaders, trainers, digital stakeholders, and social organizations representing qualitative methodologies.

Findings revealed that the total awareness of the EU among Kenyan youth is at 62 percent, which is moderate name recognition. Furthermore, it is evident that the awareness of the EU is not balanced among the counties, nor is it in-depth. Although 82 percent of the respondents managed to identify one of the EU-funded projects, few could explain the bigger picture of what the EU does in Kenya. Notably, the key areas that the youth identified with the EU were: police and security sector reform (64.2 percent), Erasmus+ projects and education (29.5 percent), climate or environmental projects (26 percent), digital innovation, and Team Europe multi-partner projects, which were significantly lower.

Perceptions of EU visibility were mixed. While the EU is seen as a credible development partner, there is limited direct engagement of EU with the Kenyan youth. Only 26.5 percent of the respondents had direct personal engagement with any of the EU-funded programs, whereas almost 70 percent of the group had never directly engaged with any of their programs, citing a lack of information or digital exclusion as significant factors. FGDs were consistent with these results, with youth from the rural areas expressing that the “EU is heard of but rarely seen, apart from NGO communities.”

Trust in the EU came out to be conditional, rather than unconditional. Though 55 percent of people showed their trust in the EU-funded schemes despite the 2024 protests, 31 percent showed a lack of trust, mostly because of the lack of adequate

communication by the EU in cases of police brutality or social unrest. It came out that young people appreciate the diplomacy of the EU but would like to witness more overt support for human rights ideals in critical situations within their nation.

Despite these issues, the study revealed that the youth showed significant openness to engaging with the EU in a more transparent, inclusive, and participatory forms. Transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in governance were strongly emphasized among the respondents for governance-related interventions at the county level. In conclusion, the results point to a critical need for the EU to not only make significant programmatic efforts in the youth space in Kenya but also to ensure that it is visible, youth-responsive, and inclusive in engaging with youth as key partners. This would be crucial for it to regain the trust of Kenyan youth and ensure that their collaboration is sustained.

# 1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and Context

Kenya's youth, who make up nearly 70 percent of the country's population, are increasingly vocal in shaping national discourse on governance, accountability, and international cooperation. In recent years, the youth have mobilized across digital and civic spaces to demand greater transparency and inclusiveness from both local and international institutions (Nduvi & Muniu, 2025; UNESCO, 2025). The 2024 Gen-Z-led protests marked a critical turning point in youth engagement, drawing attention to issues of police brutality, fiscal irresponsibility on the part of the government, unemployment, and democratic participation.

The European Union (EU) has remained one of Kenya's long-term partners, investing heavily in governance, education, human rights, and youth empowerment programs. Its initiatives under frameworks such as the "EU Youth Action Plan in External Action (2022-2027)" (European Commission, 2025) and "Team Europe Initiatives" seek to foster dialogue and inclusive development. However, despite these efforts, a trust gap has emerged between Kenyan youth and the EU Delegation, particularly regarding visibility, responsiveness, and inclusivity in moments of national crisis.

This study, *Kenyan Youth Perception of the Role and Impact of the European Union Mission in Kenya*, was therefore undertaken to explore how young people perceive the EU Delegation's role, credibility, and impact. It builds on a growing recognition that youth are not only beneficiaries but critical partners in development, policy dialogue, and peacebuilding.

## 1.2 Problem Statement and Rationale

While the EU continues to fund youth-centered projects in Kenya, limited awareness of these programs persists, especially outside major urban centers. Many young people identify the EU only with scholarships or foreign aid rather than as an active development partner. The Gen-Z protests further highlighted erosion of trust, with youth questioning the EU's silence during the protests which were marred with violence.

The rationale for this research is therefore twofold. First, to document youth perceptions and experiences with EU-supported initiatives, identifying areas of disconnect between design and delivery. Second, provide evidence-based recommendations for rebuilding trust and designing youth engagement models that are participatory, inclusive, and context-sensitive.

### 1.3 Study Objectives

The study sought to:

- i. Assess Kenyan youth awareness and understanding of the EU and its mission in Kenya.
- ii. Examine youth perceptions of the EU's relevance, trustworthiness, and visibility.
- iii. Evaluate the accessibility and inclusivity of EU-funded youth programs.
- iv. Recommend strategies for stronger engagement between the EU and Kenya's youth.

### 1.4 Research Questions

The study was guided by four thematic questions, aligned to the EU Youth Action Plan pillars:

- What do Kenyan youth know about the EU and its mission in Kenya, and what sources inform this knowledge?
- What channels of engagement currently exist between the EU and youth, and how can they be strengthened?
- What barriers prevent youth from meaningfully participating in EU-funded programs?
- How do Kenyan youth wish to engage with the EU moving forward?

### 1.5 Scope of the Study

The study was conducted across five counties: Baringo, Makueni, Taita Taveta, Kericho, and Nairobi. The five counties were selected to represent diverse geographic, socioeconomic, and digital contexts. This selection ensured inclusion of both urban and rural youth, as well as those engaged in formal and informal economic activities.

The study focused on four key themes: youth awareness and understanding of the European Union (EU) and its mission in Kenya, perceptions of EU relevance and trustworthiness, accessibility of youth-focused programs, and recommendations for stronger EU–youth engagement.

The respondents comprised young people aged 18–35 years, youth leaders, educators, and development partners across the five counties. The study period spanned August to October 2025.

## 1.6 Significance of the Study

Understanding youth perceptions of the EU Delegation's role is crucial for designing responsive, inclusive, and locally grounded cooperation frameworks. The findings will inform FEMNET, the EU Delegation, and youth-focused partners on how to build mutual trust, improve program visibility, and enhance youth participation in EU-Kenya development cooperation. The study also provides a reference for other international actors seeking to strengthen engagement with African youth.

## 2 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

Kenya has a predominantly **youth** population, with approximately 70 percent of its citizens aged below 35 years. This demographic reality places young people at the center of the country's socio-economic, political, and developmental trajectory. As such, understanding youth perceptions and levels of engagement with international development partners—particularly the European Union—is critical for building sustainable and effective partnerships. This literature review identifies a key gap in existing research by examining Kenyan youth perspectives on the visibility, credibility, and engagement approaches of the EU, which the present study seeks to address.

### 2.2 Local and National Landscape: Youth Civic Engagement and Governance in Kenya

At the local and national levels, civic consciousness is characterized by high levels of civic engagement in Kenya, but the structural environment presents a limitation to active civic engagement for the Kenyan youth. Various studies demonstrate the existence of a paradox where the current outspoken nature of the Kenyan youth, especially in the form of cyber activism demonstrated in campaigns such as #FEMICIDE<sup>1</sup> () and the Gen Z tax protest in 2024<sup>2</sup>, is contradictory to the low levels of their engagement in governance structures. The Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis describes the issue in the following way:

Findings from the Centre for Multiparty Democracy-Kenya (CMD-Kenya, 2018) and the National Gender and Equality Commission (National Gender and Equality Commission, 2022) highlight the crucial barriers of a lack of information, civic education, and the overriding control of political elites in political parties to be addressed. Moreover, a baseline survey conducted in the study of youth in political parties reveals the existence of youth leagues in political organizations that exist only to make a cosmetic appearance and fail to make any tangible contribution to decision making<sup>4</sup>. The realities of the local context informed by active but disappointed civic engagement, provide the immediate environment in which the relevancy and availability of global actors, such as the EU, are evaluated by the youth.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/endfemicideke/?hl=en>

<sup>2</sup> <https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2024/12/17/framing-gen-z-protests-against-the-2024-finance-bill-in-kenya-a-linguistic-assessment-on-tiktok-2/>

### 2.3 National and Regional Landscape: Youth trust in International Partners

The trust of the youth in African global development institutions is in no way automatic and fixed but requires demonstration in terms of alignment and commitment. In the Kenyan context, trust is complex, depending on the findings of studies such as the one conducted by the Afrobarometer Report in 2023 (Afrobarometer, 2023). The impression is that global institutions are more credible than political structures in Kenya but in a manner that requires constant attention and commitment. Lack of success in addressing issues in governance and security through donor assistance is bound to make the seemingly hard-won trust evaporate in a short while, such as in the "diplomatic silence" experience in the 2024 protests in the country.

At a regional level, the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM, 2023) notes with concern: "The visibility and 'brand recognition' of bodies such as the EU tend to be low at the grassroots level, despite large outlays of funds." The youth will receive the benefits but will be unaware that a particular organization has assisted them along the way, and this will cause a disconnection in their faithfulness to the organization whose impacts they are enjoying in their lives. This scenario reflects the important factor that the EU has a huge soft and long-term investment approach in the region which has been noted to be subtle by a DAAD award winner in the conducted Key Interview Sessions in this investigation.

### 2.4 Global and Strategic Landscape: Donor Engagement and Youth-Focused Programming

Internationally, the existence of the "paradigm shift in the area of 'youth inclusion'" in development instruments has been acknowledged. The UN Youth Strategy (2030) and the EU's Youth Action Plan in External Action (2022-2027), to name a couple, are commitments to working together with the active involvement of the "agents of changes" and not simply the "passive benefactors" in the way of co-creating and capacity-building actions in defining and interlocking the will of the 'Youth Dimension in the fields of Digital Transformation and climate actions' (SDGs Goals: Goal 4 and Goal 13 & Goal 16).

Nevertheless, in current practice, according to the literature and assessments of programs implemented, such as those conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2021) there are implementation deficits that remain unaddressed. Engagement tends to be activity-based (such as training sessions) and tends to be top-down and solution-driven through donors, and according to the

assessment studies of the World Justice Project (2023), the current design tends to create a mismatch in the aims and objectives of the programs and the pressing need of the youth in specific contexts, such as jobs and the safeguard against violence by the State.

The current global concern against the tendency of "tokenistic but not transformative engagement with and for the effective and full contribution of youth to governance and to their country's development and well-being" (ANND and UNRISD, 2018) offers the framework through which the current model of engagement of the EU in the Republic of Kenya should be judged.

## **2.5 Knowledge Gap and Study Justification**

Though there is a considerable amount of literature regarding youth civic engagement in the context of Kenya and the overall framework of international development cooperation, a considerable gap lies within the domain of specific perceptions of a large partnering institution such as the EU, directly from the milieu of the targeted youth groups, in terms of the credibility and visibility of a partnering mission in both stable and unstable conditions.

This project directly responds to the gap existing in the literature and the current state of the current EU-Kenya dialogue. The project will focus not only on the current levels of awareness but will also explore the complex determinants of trust and distrust, the real barriers to access, and finally the recommendations that the youth provide in their efforts to deepen their engagement with the EU and ultimately assist in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals through an effective and strengthened cooperation framework in the EU-Kenya dialogue process.

### 3 CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design and Approach

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to generate comprehensive insights into Kenyan youth perceptions of the European Union (EU) and its mission in Kenya. This approach ensured the inclusion of measurable trends (from surveys) and contextual explanations (from interviews and focus groups).

Quantitative data were gathered through structured online surveys distributed via Kobo Collect and Google Forms, while qualitative data were collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The combination of these tools allowed for triangulation, strengthening the validity and reliability of the findings. The methodology is summarized in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Summary of the Study Methodology

#### 3.2 Scope of Work and County Selection

The study covered five counties: Baringo, Makueni, Taita Taveta, Kericho, and Nairobi. These counties were purposively selected to capture the diversity of Kenya's youth demographics and social contexts.

#### 3.3 Sampling and Participants

A multi-stage sampling strategy was used.

1. Quantitative sample

A total of 701 youth respondents participated in the survey. Respondents were aged between 18 and 35 years and represented both male and female youth.

2. Qualitative sample

- Five FGDs were conducted, one per county, each consisting of 8-10 participants selected purposively to represent diverse youth segments (students, entrepreneurs, community organizers, and digital innovators).

- Ten KIIs were conducted with key stakeholders, including researchers, lecturers, youth officers, digital trainers, development partners, and beneficiaries of EU-funded programs.

### 3.4 Data Collection Methods and Tools

- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):**

FGDs were conducted physically in the respective counties using a semi-structured guide. Discussions explored awareness, trust, engagement platforms, and youth perspectives on EU responsiveness. Each session lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and was audio recorded with consent.

- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):**

10 KIIs were conducted with subject-matter experts via Zoom or telephone to capture institutional perspectives on EU programs and policy implementation.

- **Online Surveys:**

Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires deployed through Kobo Collect and Google Forms. The survey included both closed and Likert-scale questions assessing awareness, trust, and engagement levels.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, producing frequency distributions, averages, and cross-tabulations across counties, gender, and age. Qualitative data from FGDs and KIIs were transcribed verbatim, coded thematically, and analyzed to identify recurring narratives related to awareness, engagement, trust, and visibility.

Findings were triangulated to validate results and strengthen interpretation, with qualitative evidence used to explain or reinforce statistical patterns.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical research standards to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any stage, and how their data would be used.

Written and verbally informed consent was obtained before data collection. To protect privacy, pseudonyms or role-based identifiers were used in place of real names. All data was securely stored on password-protected devices, accessible only to the core research team.

### 3.7 Quality Assurance

To maintain data integrity, the research team employed a multi-layered quality assurance process:

- i. Training of enumerators: Field teams received orientation on research ethics, tool administration and tool content, and neutrality in facilitation.
- ii. Supervision and spot-checks: The lead researcher conducted random quality checks on recorded discussions and survey data entries.
- iii. Data cleaning: Responses from Kobo Collect and Google Forms were harmonized, with inconsistent variables standardized to enable merged analysis.
- iv. Peer validation: Preliminary findings were reviewed internally by FEMNET and youth research focal persons before final synthesis.

### 3.8 Limitations and Mitigation Measures

Table 1 outlines key methodological limitations encountered during data collection and the corresponding strategies applied to minimize their impact on data quality and representativeness.

Table 1 Summary of Study Limitations and Mitigation Measures

Limitation	Description / Impact	Mitigation Measures
<b>Sample imbalance</b>	Some counties, particularly Nairobi, had lower response rates compared to others, which could skew representation across regions.	Additional respondents were mobilized through youth networks and civil society organizations to balance the dataset.
<b>Connectivity and access challenges</b>	Limited internet connectivity in rural areas hindered participation in online surveys, leading to uneven data submission.	Enumerators used offline Kobo Collect tools to capture responses and later synchronized data to ensure completeness.

<b>Time constraints</b>	Data collection coincided with civic activities, reducing participant availability and scheduling consistency.	Flexible scheduling and remote interviews (via phone and zoom) were adopted to maintain inclusivity.
<b>Potential bias</b>	Social desirability bias may have influenced how youth responded to sensitive questions about the EU.	Neutral questioning, anonymized data collection, and use of pseudonyms helped minimize bias and maintain objectivity.

## 4 CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The chapter highlights the findings of the study, organized based on the four study objectives. The results were based on a combination of survey findings, the views from the FGDs and KIIs, and where applicable, the context of the Sustainable Development Goals was used as an analytical lens to further reinforce the analysis of the findings. The findings were based on both quantitative and qualitative methods across five counties of Nairobi, Kericho, Makueni, Baringo, and Taita Taveta.

### 4.1 Respondent Demographics

A total of 701 youth respondents participated in the study across five counties: Taita Taveta, Makueni, Baringo, Kericho, and Nairobi. The selection captured both rural and urban contexts, ensuring diverse perspectives from different socioeconomic backgrounds. This section profiles respondents by county, age, gender, education, and occupation.

#### 4.1.1 County Distribution

The study achieved a balanced geographic spread of participants across the five counties as illustrated in the heatmap in Figure 2.

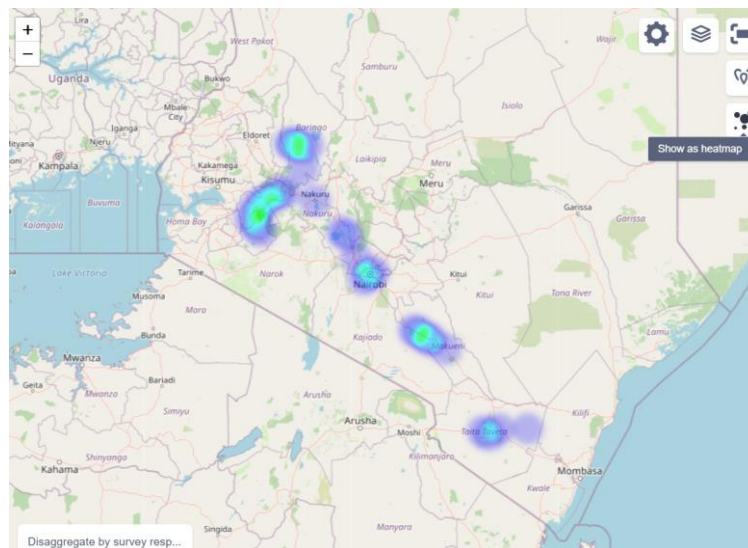


Figure 2 Location of respondents

This ensured the inclusion of youth from varying regional contexts and livelihood patterns. Table 2 shows the proportion of respondents drawn from each of the study counties

Table 2 County distribution of respondents

County	Respondents	Share of Total (%)
Taita Taveta	155	22.1
Makueni	132	18.8
Baringo	151	21.5
Kericho	165	23.5
Nairobi	98	14.0
Total	701	100.0

Table 2 illustrates that participation was highest in Kericho (23.5 percent) and Taita Taveta (22.1 percent), followed by Baringo (21.5 percent) and Makueni (18.8 percent). Nairobi (14 percent) recorded the lowest participation, highlighting the challenge of mobilizing urban youth for voluntary surveys.

#### 4.1.2 Age Distribution

The study targeted youths (18-35 years), aligning with the official youth definition in Kenya’s National Youth Policy (2019). The data reflected a strong representation of young adults in their active economic years as summarized in Figure 3.

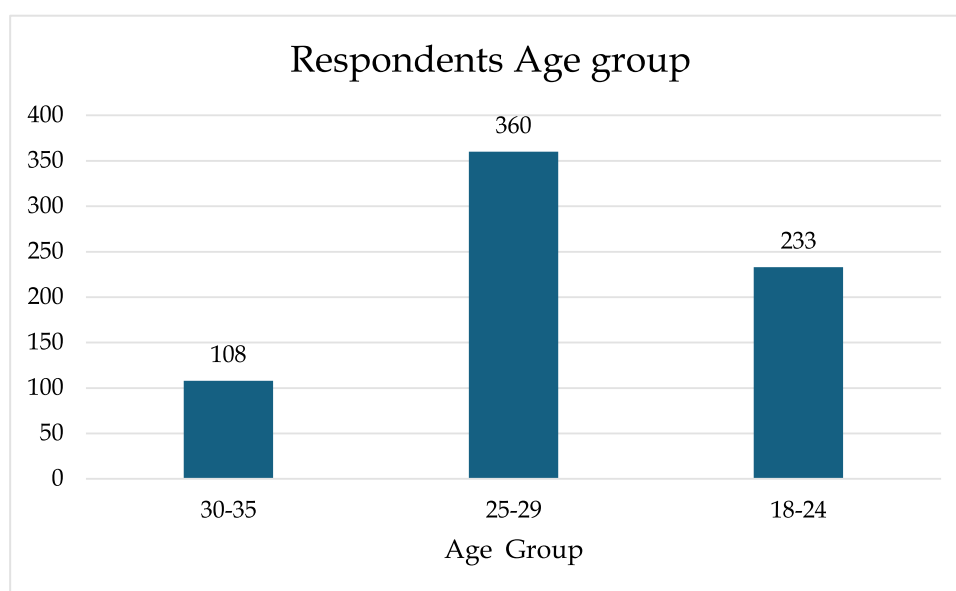


Figure 3 Age Distribution of Respondents

As shown in Figure 3, more than half of the respondents (51.4 percent) were aged 25–29 years, indicating a high concentration of young people transitioning into employment and entrepreneurship. Approximately one-third (33.2 percent) were aged 18–24, while 15.4 percent were between 30 and 35 years old.

**4.1.3 Sex Distribution**

The study attained a near-equal sex balance, ensuring both male and female perspectives were represented. Respondents who chose not to disclose their sex were included in accordance with ethical standards of anonymity.

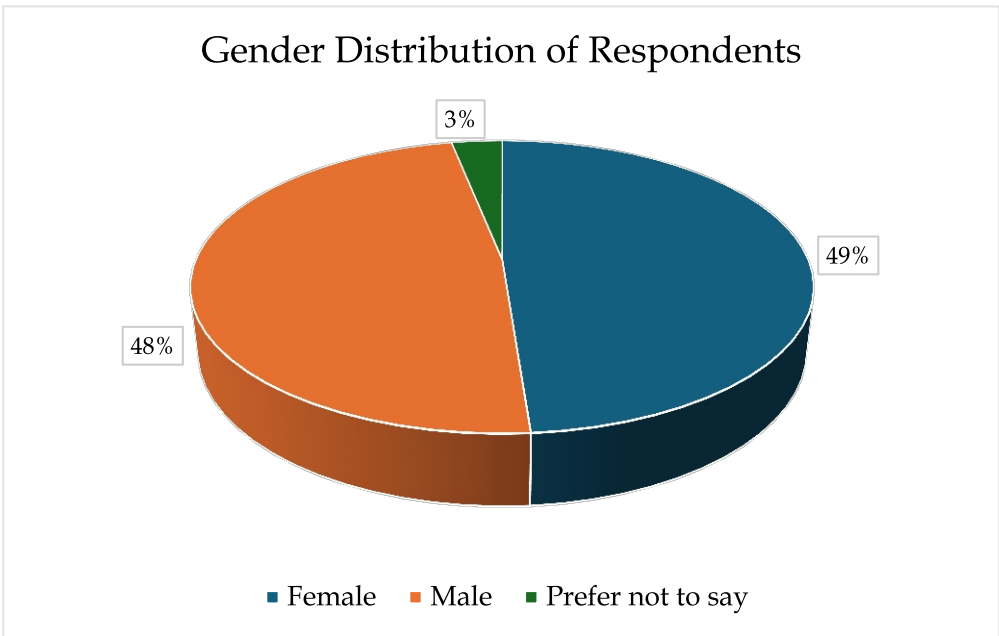


Figure 4 Gender distribution

As illustrated in Figure 4, females accounted for 48.8 percent, males 48.1 percent, and 3.1 percent preferred not to disclose their gender. This balance strengthens the inclusiveness and credibility of findings.

**4.1.4 Education Level**

Respondents exhibited varied education levels, ranging from secondary school to postgraduate studies (See Table 3). This diversity enhances the reliability of perspectives across literacy and skills levels.

Table 3 Respondents' level of education

Level of Education	Number	%
Undergraduate (University)	181	25.8
Tertiary school - Certificate, TVET, College	211	30.1
Secondary School	260	37.1
Postgraduate	49	7.0
	701	100

As evidenced in Table 3, 37 percent had completed secondary education, 30 percent held college or TVET qualifications, 26 percent held undergraduate degrees, and 7 percent were postgraduates. The findings point to a moderately educated youth population well-positioned for employment and civic engagement.

#### 4.1.5 Occupational Status

Participants' employment situations varied across formal and informal sectors (see Figure 5). This diversity provided insight into how economic participation shapes perceptions of EU programs.

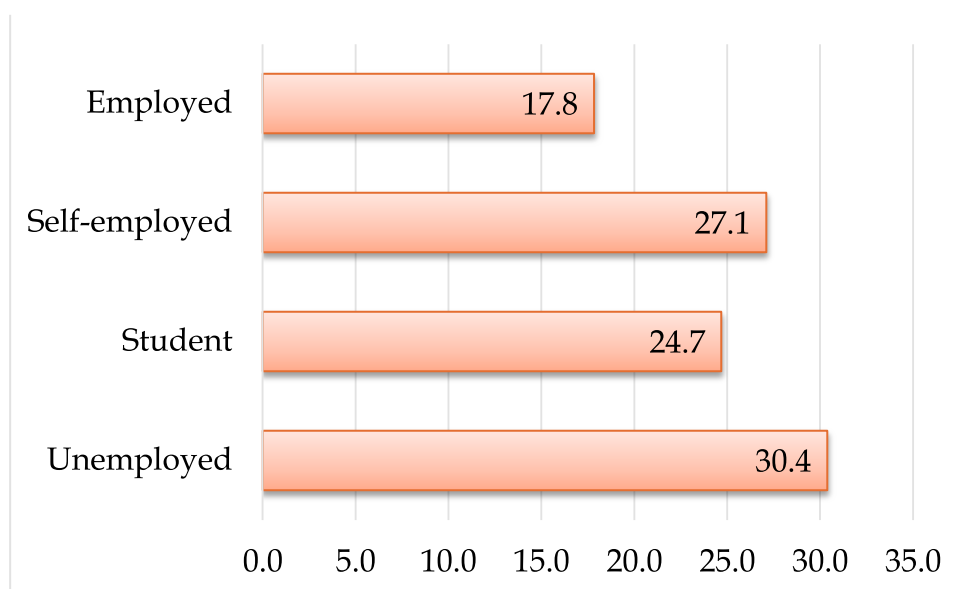


Figure 5 Occupational Status of the respondents

Overall, the demographic profile reflects a youth, gender-balanced, and moderately educated population, largely engaged in self-employment or job-seeking. This diversity established a strong foundation for analyzing awareness, engagement, and trust toward the EU in subsequent sections.

## 4.2 Awareness and Understanding of the EU

The level of awareness regarding the presence of the European Union in Kenya is relatively moderate but characterized by a large gap in attribution. Overall, the proportion of survey participants claiming to be aware of the EU Mission in Kenya was 62%. However, a closer inspection showed that while the proportion of those aware of the institutional presence is slightly above sixty percent, the proportion aware of at least one project supported by the EU was considerably higher at 82%. This gap indicated a problem in visibility in the sense that while the projects implemented in Kenya through EU engagement in issues such as climate mitigation, education, and security may be well known to and actually involve the country's youth, their attributes and the fact that the EU plays the role of the catalyst in their implementation tend to be less known and understood.

This attribution gap is clear in the manner in which the EU reaches the first point of contact with the youth. Social media platforms, named by 46.7% of the population within the survey, are the principal entry point into the EU, followed by radio at 20.5% and through their social networks at 18.5%. It is important to note the surprisingly low number of only 2.2% of the survey members whose first interaction with the EU occurred through official EU-held events.

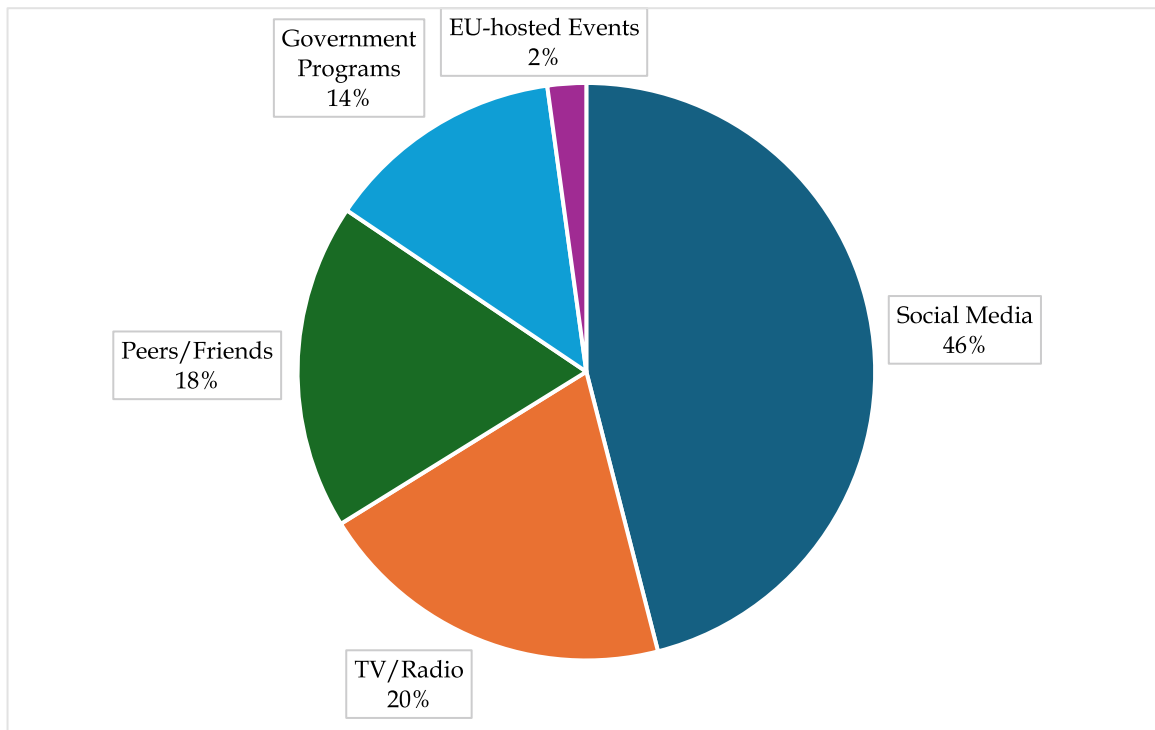


Figure 6 Sources of EU-related information

Findings from the FGDs provide a clear insight into the manner in which the first interactions with the EU instigated e.g. through isolated events in the form of scholarships and climate campaign ads on the likes of TikTok and X (Twitter) platforms: “You hear from the EU only when there is a launch of a project and an announcement through a competition. You hear nothing until the next one.”

Awareness was not geographically evenly distributed. There were clear disparities in the data, with the highest levels of awareness in Taita Taveta at 84.8% and in Baringo at 82.5%, where the presence of environmental initiatives and peacebuilding through EU funding is clearly evident. At the opposite ends of the spectrum, the levels of awareness fall considerably in Nairobi (36%) and Makueni (22.4%).

While the presence of the EU in Nairobi is possibly overshadowed in a sea of global organizations, in Makueni, limited or lack of available information emerged from the participants:

*We have very few international organizations. We actually don't know them because there is no one to tell us... We've not seen them benefit us*

said a respondent in Kericho expressing the sentiment in many rural and semi-urban settings.

When asked to illustrate the EU's involvement, the theme that the respondents most

associated the EU with was police and security sector reform projects (SDG16) cited by 64.2%, followed by, the Erasmus+ scholarship scheme (SDG4) cited by 29.5% then climate and environment projects (SDG13), cited by 26%.

Table 4: Awareness of EU-Supported Programs by Count and Percentage

Program	Count	% Of respondents
Climate/Environment	150	26.0
Police or Security	370	64.2
Erasmus+	170	29.5
EU Delegation Traineeships	60	10.4
EuropeAid youth-CBO grants	48	8.3
EU-Africa Youth Cooperation	17	3.0
D4D, digital-skills	17	3.0
Horizon Europe Youth Programs	40	6.9
Team Europe Initiatives (TEI)	18	3.1

The uptake of EU strategic frameworks, such as the Team European initiatives and digital innovation programs (D4D), however, was less than 10%. This fixes the level of youth understanding to be more a function of output linked to discrete projects than to the output of the strategic partnerships available to the EU in Kenya.

### 4.3 Accessibility and Inclusivity of EU Programs

Though there was a moderate level of awareness, the rate of direct interaction with the EU opportunities is low, and the level of inaccessibility and lack of inclusivity stands out clearly. The survey statistics prove that only 26.5% of the people surveyed, have directly engaged in EU-funded projects, and a significant proportion of respondents, namely 69.8% of those surveyed, have failed to do so.

The results of the qualitative study offered a detailed insight into the system-wide barriers causing this gap. For the five counties, the FGD participants consistently picked out five challenges:

1. **Information Asymmetry:** The information regarding the opportunities is shared in a closed social circuit of large NGOs, and university networks, and reaches the rural and informal groups of youth only after the deadline has passed.

*"We hear about opportunities after they are closed,"*

said a participant at the focus group in Baringo.

2. **Digital Exclusion:** The EU dependence on digital platforms to communicate and make applications excludes the youth in the region where the internet and smartphone penetration are low.

*"Most of the programs in fact require stable internet or computers, which many young people in our area don't have," said a respondent in Taita Taveta County."*

3. **Procedural Complexity:** Application procedures are commonly cited to be complex and bureaucratic, filled with technical terms and needing levels of experience that discourage first-time applicants.

- *"Requirements in terms of experience and education level are discouraging to us. At times, you feel such projects are not for ordinary people," said a Makueni youth resident."*

4. **Urban and Institutional Biases:** The programs and activities of the organization take place in Nairobi and thus financially and physically restrict the participation of youth from other provinces.

5. **Intermediary Gatekeeping:** Young people feel that the large civic organizations that function as implementers of the EU's work can function in the capacity of "gatekeeping," in favor of existing networks and to the detriment of smaller, civic groups of youth.

The results show that the perceptions of youth inclusivity in the initiatives of the European Union in Kenya are generally moderate, with some levels of skepticism. While 38% of the respondents selected level 3, which is a moderate level of inclusivity, a total of 54% of the respondents selected the lowest levels of inclusivity (1 and 2), which indicate that more than half of the respondents who were surveyed feel that the initiatives of the European Union are not inclusive enough. On the other hand, only 7.4% of the respondents selected the positive levels of inclusivity (4 and 5).

Moreover, in spite of the alignment of the EU projects in skills training and the achievement of goal number 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth, the long-term

effectiveness of the projects has been questioned by the trainees. The absence of a direct link to the attainment of employment and entrepreneurial jobs has been discussed by a KII participant:

*“Training is conducted, but the link to employment and startup funds is faint.”*

The EU stands out in the sense that it is considered a credible and relevant development partner, but this is a trust that is conditional and has been put to the test during the political crisis in 2024. Evidence based on the survey administered showed that while 55% of the people surveyed said that they continued to trust the programs supported by the EU despite the youth-led protests in the country, 31% said that their trust in the programs was diminished.

The 2024 protests marked a significant turning point in how Kenyan youth perceive the European Union and its role in the country. A key concern relates to perceptions of the EU’s neutrality in foreign policy, with some youth viewing this stance as limiting the EU’s ability to act as a visible advocate for civic rights during periods of national crisis. Given the EU’s longstanding partnership with Kenya, respondents expressed expectations for clearer alignment between the EU’s governance commitments and its public engagement, particularly in relation to SDG 16.10 on responsive, inclusive, and representative decision-making.

The EU’s engagement in police sector reforms was taken up enthusiastically in debates regarding accountability and relevance. Though a considerable 64.2% of the youth population was aware of the EU’s engagement in this sector, the views regarding its relevance to the youth’s priority concerns appear to be passionately split.

*“The EU funds the police with water cannons and trains the police. They need to make sure that those things aren’t used against us,” said a FGD participant, opening up a fierce debate regarding the responsibility of donors to be accountable regarding the use of funds.*

Repairing security sector institutions to implement the target regarding “Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions” in the form of the SDG Goal 16 is recognized by the EU and its critics alike.

Ultimately, the findings made clear that the views of the EU’s importance and trustworthiness are a dynamic process undertaken by the youth and that trust is

maintained through the clear benefits derived out of the programs linked to education and climate issues but vulnerable to a mismatch in the values the EU espouses and the actions taken in the governance crises states through its actions in the public domain regarding the value of the partnerships for the goals of the UN's Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals, concentrated in the tenets of accountability and transparency in the partnerships.

## 5 CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusions

The study concludes that Kenyan youth have a generally positive perception of the European Union (EU), recognizing its contribution to education, governance, and environmental initiatives. Engagement remains largely indirect, as most EU-funded projects are implemented through local partners without consistent visibility of the EU's brand or communication.

Trust in the EU is conditional rather than absolute. While many youths appreciate the EU's ongoing support for democracy, peace, and social inclusion, they expressed mixed views about its visibility and stance during moments of political tension, including the 2024 protests. The association between the EU and police reform programs raised questions about accountability, though most respondents emphasized the need for reform continuity with stronger oversight.

Overall, Kenyan youth regard the EU as a credible, development-oriented partner but expect more transparency, inclusivity, and proactive communication. They called for localized engagement, stronger participation in program design, and the creation of channels that bridge rural-urban divides in access to opportunities.

### 5.2 Recommendations

The following are summary of recommendations

#### 5.2.1 *Emerging Opportunities and Youth Proposals*

Despite these challenges, youth expressed optimism about deepening engagement with the EU. Across counties, participants proposed practical ways to improve visibility and participation:

- Establish county-level youth ambassadors or focal points to coordinate communication and outreach.
- Use popular digital spaces such as TikTok, WhatsApp, and campus associations for real-time updates.
- Strengthen direct communication through roadshows, dialogue forums, and mentorship programs.
- Simplify application processes and provide feedback loops to sustain

motivation.

As one Kericho participant suggested:

*“Let the EU talk to youth directly, not only through big NGOs. Create county youth desks where we can go for information.”*

A DAAD beneficiary interviewed for this study added:

*“Stay away from prescribed solutions – co-design programs with youth to make them fit for purpose and context.”*

These proposals demonstrate a strong appetite among youth for **two-way engagement** grounded in partnership rather than dependency.

### **1. Enhance Strategic Visibility and Youth-Focused Communication**

- Develop and implement a country-wide communications strategy that goes beyond project-specific press releases. This should include co-branding with partners at each project site and at public events.
- Engage the youth through the platforms they favor (TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram) and provide two-way dialogue interaction instead of conducting one-way broadcasts. The message should be in accessible formats and language.
- Set Up County-level EU Youth Focal Points: The project should establish County-level EU Focal Points to ensure the decentralization of information flow while establishing credible ambassadors in each county to bridge the visibility gap between urban and rural areas.

### **2. Systematize Inclusive and Accessible Program**

- Mandate and provide funds for proactive outreach efforts for each and every EU-funded scheme to make sure that marginal groups are reached, such as rural youth, young females, the disabled, and informal groups of youth.
- Streamline application processes and terms, offer application assistance, and establish offline application options (such as through SMS services or community centers) to address technological and literacy issues.
- Personnel capacity-building/training initiatives (SD Goal 4 & 8) should be followed up with well-articulated and funded mechanisms to facilitate their

long-term effectiveness and should include seed funds and internship connections/mentoring.

### **3. Incorporate Co-Creation and Youth Leadership into the Partnership Model:**

- Instituting youth participation through the establishment of a permanent National Youth Advisory Council and encouraging the development of county-based youth groups to co-design, monitor, and evaluate EU programs from start to finish.
- Strengthen direct and flexible funding channels to registered youth-led and community-based initiatives to move away from large NGO middlemen and encourage ownership.
- Increase the availability of programs such as the Youth Sounding Board and the Erasmus+ to include more non-university-based youth, TVET-based, and similar groups.

### **4. Enhance Accountability and Transparent Crisis Communications:**

- A clear protocol regarding how to engage in a governance/human rights issue in the country should be developed and implemented. Statements regarding commitment to the implementation of Goal 16 are important in enabling trust to be maintained.
- Policies and programs relating to the governance and security sector should ensure the existence of oversight mechanisms that are transparent and independent and include representation from the youth sector in civil society organizations to oversee the implementation and observance of human rights.
- Publicly publish the outcome and effect of EU-funded projects through clear and understandable reporting, making the results accountable to the people of Kenya.

## **Recommendations for the Government of Kenya (National and County)**

### **1. Foster an Enabling Environment for Youth-EU Collaboration:**

- Incorporate the EU-funded initiatives meant for the development of the youth into the CIDPs in order to ensure sustainability and co-ownership by the governments.

- Enhance coordination between the country ministries and the EU Delegation to improve partnerships and avoid duplication of efforts through the county youth directorates.
- Adhere to human rights and accountability standards in all fields, such as security, to ensure that the reform efforts supported through assistance translate into positive changes for the people and the opening of civic space.

## **2. Amplify the Role of the youth**

- Formalize and adequately resource effective representation of the youth in important decision-making structures at the country and county levels.
- Engage the EU and CSOs to facilitate large civic education and participation forums to educate the youth on the governance processes and the available partnerships for collaboration.

## **Recommendations for Civil Society Organizations (Implementing Partners)**

### **1.Champion Inclusivity and Reduce Gate**

- Above all, the focus should be put on the transmission of information to the grassroots structures, and a variety of methods should be applied to ensure that the awareness of the opportunities reaches everyone well in advance of the deadline.
- Seek to involve and coach smaller groups in the youth sector to access EU-funded initiatives.
- Use the European Union in a clear and constant manner in allocating funds to the programs and in partnerships to fill the gap in branding noted in the study above.

## **Recommendations for Youth and Youth-Led Networks**

### **Actively Engage and;**

- Foster the capacity and credibility of groups of youth to make them effective partners for institutions such as the EU.
- Build coalitions and networks to leverage many voices together, provide information about opportunities, and promote inclusive and accountable partnerships.

- Engage constructively in the current feedback mechanisms, for instance through surveys and dialogue, and make their views and recommendations known to the EU Delegation and the implementation partners.

### 5.3 Youth Recommendations for Strengthening EU-Kenya

Based on their experiences and perceptions, the Kenyan youth came up with a rich and diverse set of recommendations to put their current relations with the EU in a transformed manner, shifting the current European engagement model from the top-down donor relationship to a clear and transparent co-created one in the following way:

1. For better visibility and interaction, a decentralized and digital approach was strongly recommended by the youth groups. The appointment of EU county-based focal points/ambassadors to act as bridges for information and interaction was recommended by the youth. Alongside this, a social media approach that utilizes platforms such as TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram to facilitate frequent two-way interactions and updates, in addition to notification blasts, was considered imperative. Having community influencers that bring the EU branding to the face of the youth would enable more visibility. Most important, however, was the co-branding factor to bridge the attribution gap.

*“Let the EU communicate directly with the youth, and not only through large NGOs but establish a youth desk in each county where we get the information,” said a respondent from Kericho.*

2. To make the process more accessible and inclusive, recommendations emphasized the need to remove structural barriers through measures such as the use of simpler language in application processes, extending deadlines, and developing offline application options through SMS and local center initiatives. The youth emphasized the need for active recruitment and guaranteed quotas in programs targeting marginalized communities such as rural youth, young females, and people with disabilities, to make them more accessible to everyone along the lines of the achievement of SDGs 5 and 10.
3. Integrating capacity-building initiatives with seed funds, internship, and employment programs was cited to make EU intervention more relevant and effective in economic empowerment along the lines of the attainment of SDG 8.

4. For the crucial area of trust and accountability, the youth demanded transparency and responsiveness in the following: The EU should make official public expressions of its views on governance and human rights in countries experiencing a national crisis to align its foreign policy with its developmental aspirations (SDG Goal number 16).
5. For the area of police reform, the demands include: The formation of independent and youth-held advisory bodies to oversee the implementation process and provide a platform for accountability. Increased transparency in the reporting of the results of EU-funded initiatives to allow the youth to understand the tangible difference the partnership has made.

The theme that really came out in every recommendation made was the need to co-create in a way that has meaning. The notion has consistently been made that the youth want to be partners, and not simply the target of programs and projects.

*“The youth are not simply the target but should be the partners in the design of solutions,” a key informant emphasized.*

The need to share the governance of development programs is the heartbeat of a new, trust-based partnership and aligns with the fabric of SDG Goal 17.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: FGD, KII, Consent Form and Survey Interview Questions



# KENYAN YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS MISSION IN KENYA



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