

Ville Majamaa, Vice-President of the European Youth Forum (YFJ)

“The European Youth Forum: “the voice of young people in Europe” empowering young people to participate actively in society”

*Secretary General of the Council of Europe
President of the Ministers' Deputies
Ministers' Deputies
Ambassadors
Colleagues*

- Please thank them for the opportunity and for putting young people at the core of this exchange. It is a very important moment for us to see young people and youth issues at the core of this organisation.

I am the vice-president of the European Youth Forum.

(Short presentation of YFJ) - The European Youth Forum is the biggest youth platform in the world. It represents the interests of millions of young people and the ones of their organisations. At present we have 44 National Youth Councils and 61 International Youth NGOs. The Member Organisations of the Youth Forum are also networks, through which we outreach to roughly 6000 youth organisations, directly to 40 million young people and indirectly to over 150 million of young people. We and our members operate in all Council of Europe member States.

By representing the interests of our members and defending the rights of young people, the Youth Forum implements hundreds of activities every year involving a wide variety of stakeholders. Our flagship activities include the European Youth Event and Yo!Fest, the European Youth Capital, the Youth Progress Index, just to name a few.

The Council of Europe is a long-time key institutional partner of the Youth Forum. Together with the European Union and the United Nations, it is regarded as one of the three main institutional systems, which the Youth Forum is systematically engaging with.

As you very well know, the Council of Europe has a long tradition of working with young people (pioneering this work among International Organisations) and, relying on co-management by youth organisations and governments, it has been a pioneer user of a youth participation in policy- and decision-making. We (at the European Youth Forum) have been promoting this model as the reference model for youth participation thoroughly!

At the European Youth Forum we are convinced that the work of the European Youth Centres in Strasbourg and in Budapest, as well as the support provided by the European Youth Foundation to youth organisations and the co-management system in the youth field, constitute an irreplaceable support to youth work and the entire youth sector in Europe. Looking back and seeing all that has been achieved for young people and youth organisations thanks to those instruments in the last 50 years (year of creation of the European Youth Foundation) should be an additional reason to celebrate today and to look ahead to achieve even more in the future!

The Council of Europe has long championed the rights of the most excluded and marginalised young people, including young LGBTQI+, Roma and other ethnic and religious minorities, refugees and those from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

However, young people are still facing obstacles to fully access their rights. I want to highlight here some of the main challenges we have identified together with our members and which are currently affecting the life of young people across Europe.

Digitalisation

The technological evolution has had a major impact on the ways in which young people conduct their lives as well as the ways in which others seek to relate to the young. We believe that the role of further digitalisation is a challenge that needs to be considered and confronted.

Demographic

The changing demographics of Europe, particularly on account of ageing societies, are having an impact on all social groups, but particularly the young, calling for new approaches to inter-generational relations and the distribution of resources.

Social inclusion

Young people are the group most at risk of poverty and social exclusion in Europe and strengthening mechanisms to youth participation and to guarantee young people's access to rights is of utmost importance to give the chance to young people to design and craft the life they want. Young people are too often suffering from the denial of their right to participate on equal terms in social relationships in economic, social, cultural or political areas.

Education

The current generation is the most educated generation in history. Despite this fact, young people are still struggling to access quality jobs!

Civic space and youth activism

Despite the increasing obstacles to access civic space in some European countries, young people are showing great political and civic activism. For example, the Fridays for Future initiatives are mobilising millions of young people for the common good.

The high turnout in the 2019 European elections was driven by a surge in participation by young people. Specifically young citizens under 25 years (+14 percentage points) as well as the 25-39 year-olds (+12 percentage points) turned out in greater numbers than before.

Membership in youth organisations is rising, according to research!

Despite all that, youth organisations are witnessing increasing trends to seek to restrict their activities, including financial restrictions.

This new youth strategy aims at tackling the key challenges young people are facing today. We are convinced that this strategy has a key to success, it has been developed and will be implemented in partnership with young people!

I would like to stress that supporting youth work, developing quality youth policy across member states, ensuring quality youth participation and increasing investments in youth will be key to tackle the key challenges young people are facing today and to improve their access to rights!

I would like to conclude by saying that you can rely on the European Youth Forum as a partner to bring forward the fight to ensure all young people have access to their rights. We are convinced this strategy will bring this fight in the right direction.