

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH

Monday, 30 March 2020

OPEN LETTER TO YOUNG PEOPLE AND YOUTH ORGANISATIONS WORKING WITH AND THROUGH THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

We are living in unprecedented times that feel like everything we know and understand has suddenly been put at risk. Less than one month ago, many of us lived normal lives, some of us even privileged ones - and yet, in the blink of an eye, a global pandemic shifted the narrative of our lives into one of global fear and uncertainty. As a generation, today's youth has been consistently called a 'snowflake' generation. A generation, which is unable to understand the sacrifices our elders made for us in uniting Europe, an impatient generation, which is not willing to roll up our sleeves to get work done. Yet, in the face of this pandemic, we are one of the generations with the capacity to reimagine our world, and transform it for the better.

The role of young people has never been more crucial.

Every news outlet is currently being dominated by a global pandemic threatening everyone's lives, especially those who are most vulnerable. Governments have taken measures to stop the quick spread, which have had further impact on other groups of society. The overall consequences of the pandemic have left our entire society, including young people, feeling uncertain about their employment, a stable income and their futures. It also threatens our mental health around navigating this newly created scenario, whilst making us fear for the safety of ourselves and those closest to us. Borders are closing down rapidly, leaving millions of students stranded on foreign soil, with little or no way to return home. While some young people have been victims of the recent happenings, other young people have at times shown indifference which we aim to address through our collaborative approach. Many young people are a low-risk group for contracting the virus, placing them in a unique position to support the communities around them, by showing solidarity with those affected and providing support for those who most need it. With the Advisory Council on Youth, we cooperate with government representatives frequently through our work in the Joint Council on Youth, and we will offer our support by shedding light on the impact the pandemic has on the young people and youth organisations we work with. We have already established a working group that will launch a consultation to map out the impact of the pandemic and propose solutions to mitigate it - so keep your eyes peeled!

For the last 100 years, young people and youth organisations have been at the forefront of social progress, the advancement of civil liberties, rights and big transformative changes in our communities, therefore being an important pillar for the advancement of the Council of Europe values - human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Through the youth-tailored support of the Council of Europe's Youth Department and the unique co-management system fostering youth participation in decision-making within the institution, youth organisations are supported to have an even more prominent role in developing youth policies, organising youth at grassroots levels, and building transnational bridges between them to enhance their voices and amplify their demands towards international and national institutions.

In times like these it's worth looking back at all the successes we have had for young people within the Council of Europe, to get a glimpse of what we can achieve further on - co-creating crucial recommendations from the Committee of Ministers to member states and thus setting standards regarding young people's access to rights, support for young refugees' transition to adulthood and youth work; launching and successfully closing one of the biggest campaigns of the youth sector, fighting discrimination and intolerance throughout the continent and beyond - the No Hate Speech Movement campaign; recognising our roles as key actors in peace building by the UN Security Council. These are but a few of the once seemingly impossible successes we've achieved, and some of the results that got thousands of NGOs across Europe to support the Council of Europe's Youth Department in times of budgetary crisis. But the role of young people and youth organisations has **never been more crucial**. We are not sidelining the work that has been initiated before the pandemic outbreak, being aware that many of the young people in Europe we work with are far from fully accessing their

fundamental rights and anticipating that the global pandemic will exacerbate that - creating even more disadvantage in the social balance.

Let this mandate be our contribution to a better world.

This week, I started my mandate as Chairperson of the Advisory Council on Youth, together with a team of 30 champions in an adventure for the next two years. An adventure that will consist of bringing the needs and rights of the young people and youth organisations we work with to the highest levels of the Council of Europe and its member states. With this letter I hope to reassure you that the Advisory Council on Youth will adapt to the new situation, and explore how we can support the Youth Department to adjust to the new context so that it supports those young people and youth organisations on the ground who need it most. Young people's access to rights have posed a challenge far before the pandemic, and even more so now. We want to ensure that youth organisations are well equipped to deal with current and upcoming challenges in upholding equality, human rights and democratic citizenship.

The year 2020 marked the start of a new mandate for the Advisory Council, which has been busy working remotely for the past few days - setting up management structures and working groups to ensure our work continues. Thirty young, bright and motivated individuals are now ready to **fight unconditionally for young people in Europe**, both for mitigating the consequences of the pandemic, but also looking towards the future of our two year mandate, ensuring we're on track with our long-term initiatives. Please join me in wishing them a successful mandate, which started in times of crisis, instead of times of tranquility.

We look forward to working closely with the European Youth Forum, National Youth Councils and local, national and international organisations working throughout the continent to further advance our work in tackling common challenges for the youth of Europe.

Some might say, given the state of alarm across the world, that this is not a priority. We say let us use this mandate to give a voice to the voiceless, to honor generations who have given their lives to build a better Europe for us, and to continue building a world where young people, regardless of where they come from, what they believe in, who they love, or who they are, can fulfil their potential and thrive. Let this mandate be our contribution to a better world.

We will be reaching out to you, young people and youth organisations, to learn more about your needs, experiences and work. Support us. Help us. Advise us on how we can better represent you. Tell us how you contribute to advancing youth rights, youth participation, youth work and the role of young people in developing pluralistic, democratic and inclusive societies and peace.

Join the movement and let's make history together.

Andrea UGRINOSKA

Chairperson of the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe 20/21



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Sara FINNBOGADOTTIR - Access to Rights Recommendation
Rory NEWBERY - Youth, Peace and Security
Jorge AGUADO SANCHEZ - Human Rights Education
Leonie MARTIN - Expanding the Space for Civil Society
Lydia SIAPARDANI - Enter! Recommendation
Hande TANER - Management Committee with Ukraine
Irina VESELINOVIC - Mobility, Quality Label for Youth Centres

The opinions expressed in this statement are those of the Advisory Council on Youth and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Council of Europe or its member states.