



## ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH

*English only*

### Statement of the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) on responses to the COVID-19 crisis

The Council of Europe [Advisory Council on Youth \(CCJ\)](#), in line with the priorities set out in the [Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030](#), draws member states' attention to the need to continue to guarantee the protection of young people's fundamental and human rights, especially those of vulnerable and marginalised groups, as well as their democratic participation during the COVID-19 crisis, whilst continuing to involve young people in decision-making and allowing them to partake as much as possible with their expertise.

Human rights never lose their importance, even during a pandemic. Even though the European Convention on Human Rights enables the High Contracting Parties to restrict, limit and even derogate from some of the rights in a crisis such as this one, such measures should be justified and proportional. Duty-bearers should not halt their obligations, instead they should seek safe alternatives to ensure fundamental rights and freedoms. Authorities should refrain from decisions which clearly risk an erosion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. There are positive examples in different member states of attempts to protect citizen and youth participation by using digital tools. Moreover, we have observed many young agents, bringing a vital change amid the crisis, supported by the member states and the different sectors, and the Advisory Council on Youth will continue to explore and share good practices which do not violate human rights.

During these difficult circumstances, it is crucial to acknowledge and recognise the bravery of those people, including young people, who are putting themselves at the forefront to fight this pandemic. We encourage governments to do their utmost to support these brave individuals and their families and to keep them safe, especially as they risk their own health for the sake of supporting their fellow citizens. In addition, we encourage young people who are able to help in one way or another to offer their time, skills and expertise to help overcome this pandemic, and to do so whilst following the instructions and recommendations of health officials.

Access to healthcare should remain an utmost priority during this delicate time, social, economic, legal status or nationality, should not be grounds for discrimination. Young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, minority and low-income groups, as well as refugees, should have access to basic social rights such as healthcare, medication, safe and decent housing, etc.

When tailoring coronavirus relief efforts, a gender perspective should be carefully considered, as pandemics worsen existing gender inequalities. Disease outbreaks increase the burden of balancing domestic tasks with working from home for young women, who are often also major caregivers to elderly and ill family members. Member states should be vigilant and ready to respond to an increase in cases of domestic and gender-based violence, with women, the elderly and children especially at risk, staying together with violent partners or family members throughout the day. Young LGBTIQ people who are sent to live with their families may, in many cases, face rejection, abuse or homelessness.

It is critical for society and for member states to understand the challenges faced by young LGBTIQ people. Systemic discrimination and homo/bi/transphobia result in an increased risk of poverty, unemployment and social isolation of LGBTIQ people. As a result of the lack of cultural competence and sensitivity towards LGBTIQ problems in the healthcare system, many young people avoid or delay seeking healthcare, thus aggravating health disparities and having detrimental effects on their health.

Young people with disabilities are especially vulnerable during a pandemic, they require additional support, reflecting the different dimensions of their lives, if they are to be able to live independently. People with disabilities often face discrimination in healthcare facilities, however the support provided should not challenge their rights and their dignity. Member states should take these concerns into account and ensure tailored action and access to information about the pandemic.

In response to the pandemic, some member states suspended educational mobility, work permits or visas, which had and continues to have a major impact on many young people. This mobility crisis results de facto in forced returns of young people to their home countries. This poses a severe threat, particularly to refugees and those with refugee-like status. The Advisory Council on Youth encourages member states to consider the economic and employment implications of the pandemic and to create policies that promote recovery, ensuring young people's needs and perspectives are mainstreamed into policies which result in sustainable solutions, without impacting negatively on human rights and the environment.

Civil society and governments should take into the account lessons learned from the No Hate Speech Movement Campaign and should continue monitoring and addressing instances of discrimination and hate speech of any kind, combating conspiracy theories that misinform or divide the society, preventing the naming of scapegoats or inciting of hatred. Furthermore, member states should not hinder the work of the media and, together, they should ensure access to information in multiple languages, including in regional and minority languages and sign language, and combat disinformation. During this crisis the severe implications of the digital gap can be observed, and thanks to civil society, minorities and rural areas have been equipped with Internet and computers during the pandemic.

In view of the vulnerable financial position of youth organisations, which have been impacted further by the current situation, and acknowledging the crucial role these organisations will play in the recovery of civil society after the crisis, the Advisory Council on Youth calls on all funding agencies, trusts, foundations – both private and public – to secure the sustainability of youth organisations by providing access to funding and other forms of support. To map out the challenges faced and in order to identify viable solutions, we encourage close co-operation with National Youth Councils and other umbrella youth organisations. We call on the digital business sector to facilitate access to digital tools which are crucial for youth participation and youth work for youth organisations. Youth work remains an indispensable tool to support young people on lockdown, especially those who are particularly affected by the crisis, as well as to ensure healthy civil and economic recovery.

In conclusion, the Advisory Council on Youth calls on Council of Europe member states to co-operate within Europe to mitigate the worst effects of the pandemic, but also to support countries in other regions to contain the outbreak and mitigate the dreadful outcomes. Most importantly, we call for solidarity among the member states to face this pandemic as a collective endeavour, while upholding the values for which we all stand, those of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. There is already overwhelming evidence that proves that young people remain a resource in every phase of the crisis, and therefore, member states should ensure that this potential is cherished and the access to rights is secured.

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