

## ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH (CCJ)

20 June 2024

*English only*

### Statement on Celebrating World Refugee Day

On 20 June, World Refugee Day, the Advisory Council on Youth honours refugees, particularly young ones, from around the Continent and the world, and reminds the member States of the rich body of legal instruments and policy guidance serving to protect refugees.

A refugee's story is a unique one. It details hardship, perseverance and, above all, a desire for a safer, more dignified and humane life. Amid today's heightened democratic backsliding across Europe, young refugees and asylum seekers have seen their rights curtailed. The Advisory Council on Youth calls on member States to urgently implement CM/Rec(2019)4 on supporting young refugees in their transition to adulthood, which is complementary to the commitments taken in the Reykjavik Declaration to respect the human rights of migrants and refugees.<sup>1</sup>

Although adopted by the Committee of Ministers five years ago, the Advisory Council recognises the challenges that persist in transforming the Recommendation into a living document whereby the rights of young refugees can be better safeguarded. This is especially true for the tens of thousands of unaccompanied children who arrive on Europe's shores every year, fleeing war and persecution.

Beyond the unimaginable horrors they have experienced, and which forced them to flee in the first place, many unaccompanied minors and young refugees go on to endure yet more as they face abuse and exploitation by traffickers or people smugglers in their quest. Upon arrival, they often encounter social exclusion and marginalisation, since welfare systems are not designed to integrate, house or support them to access the necessary care and protection they deserve – access to quality health care, a sound education, and a clean and secure home. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015)<sup>2</sup> recognises that young people are adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and that the disruption of young people's access to education and socio-economic opportunities has a dramatic impact on durable peace and reconciliation.

Recalling Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2159 (2017),<sup>3</sup> the Advisory Council also highlights the intersections between armed conflict, gender, and international migration patterns and how they influence the treatment young refugees experience across different borders. In that instance, young women affected by armed conflict, who are forcefully

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/4th-summit-of-heads-of-state-and-government-of-the-council-of-europe/1680ab40c1>

<sup>2</sup> <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n15/413/06/pdf/n1541306.pdf?token=5kknhsExuMbQyDZzTy&fe=true>

<sup>3</sup> <https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=23700&lang=en>

displaced or fleeing conflict, are overwhelmingly at risk of sexual violence, while also experiencing other types of gender-based violence and discrimination.

Moreover, with hate speech on the rise and the environment of social acceptance having significantly worsened since 2019, the Advisory Council on Youth reaffirms its commitment to fostering safe and inclusive spaces free from intolerance and xenophobia. Recognising these barriers is no easy task, but it is imperative to do so to challenge structural discrimination and enshrine the principles of equality. Only once these barriers have been recognised and removed will young people be truly free from all forms of discrimination.

Building on its flagship “No Hate Speech Movement” and “Democracy here | Democracy now” campaigns, along with the various training seminars and pilot projects supported by the Council of Europe Youth Department, the Advisory Council remains committed to working with member States’ representatives in the relevant statutory bodies to root out bigotry and promote integration methods aimed at supporting young refugees as they navigate their transition into adulthood and enabling their participation.

*The statements of the Advisory Council are published for the purpose of informing the public about the activities of the statutory bodies of the Council of Europe youth sector. The statements reflect the opinions and positions of the Advisory Council and its members. The views expressed therein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council of Europe.*