

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH (CCJ)

On Friday, 10 December 2020, Human Rights Day

Young people for human rights, now more than ever!

On Human Rights Day, while celebrating the 70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Advisory Council on Youth is proud to support the Council of Europe in its aim to promote and protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We take this opportunity to address the challenges young people face related to their human rights.

Young people and youth organisations have been amongst the main promoters and defenders of human rights for decades. Human rights, democracy, and the rule of law are not only the core values of the Council of Europe, but also core values embedded in meaningful youth participation and engagement. Human rights are expressed in various forms, and young people advocate for human rights on every level – from local clubs and communities, to national organisations and networks to international organisations and institutions. **Young people, as active citizens and rights-holders, are more passionate and vigilant than ever in sustaining, promoting and enhancing respect for all human rights.**

However, a lot of work remains to be done in regard to supporting the role of young people in influencing the development of stronger human rights mechanisms and a human rights-based approach to policy making. For this, youth organisations and movements are essential partners and stakeholders. The work led and co-ordinated by young people in Europe will be in vain if governments and European institutions do not systematically and continuously promote, uphold and protect human rights. **Although existing human rights frameworks are universal, there remains a need for specific protection to tackle discrimination against young people and to ensure their rights are fully recognised and protected.** Young people's access to rights is an essential element in building a culture based on the principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Many of the challenges to human rights have been reinforced this year as member states faced the Covid-19 pandemic. We want this statement to serve as a reminder that **governments are always obligated to observe human rights**. Legislators and authorities need to continue to protect the rights of citizens, even at a time when the world is facing a crisis. In many countries, the pandemic has led to far-reaching restrictions on the rights of citizens, and as a consequence, a number of human rights have been seriously challenged, such as the right to freedom of movement, the right to health and life, the right to individual and data privacy and the right to personal liberty.

Keeping in mind that institutional and civic responses to human rights challenges are interdependent and interrelated, the Advisory Council offers its expertise and support in encouraging the member states to urgently:

- implement the Committee of Ministers recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 on young people's access to rights;
- adopt a human rights-based approach to ensure young people's access to rights in order to empower them to know and claim their rights, and to improve the ability of individuals and institutions to take responsibility for respecting, protecting and fulfilling rights;
- establish or develop youth policies that more effectively facilitate young people's access to rights;

- ensure policies reflect and address the special needs of young people living in rural areas and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, as well as those belonging to vulnerable groups by improving access to education, employment, health, housing and transportation;
- recognise and support youth-led, independent democratic organisations and national youth councils as channels of participation and involvement for all young people;
- remove barriers which limit young people's democratic participation, for example by reviewing voting systems and, where appropriate, lowering the voting age, and ensuring electoral rights are enjoyed by all who are eligible, whether by simply voting or by standing for election;
- implement the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture and support the development of values, knowledge, critical understanding, skills and attitudes so that individuals can meet the challenges and opportunities that are presented by democratic and intercultural situations appropriately.

As the whole world enters into a recovery period from this pandemic, we genuinely hope that we can all come out stronger, with greater respect for our human rights and shared values than before.

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.