



# RoLYN

Rule of Law Youth Network



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## Concept note

### Rule of Law Youth Network (RoLYN)

Current threats to the rule of law and a democratic backsliding in Europe and beyond are increasingly challenging the respect of human rights and trust in our democracies. The Heads of State and Government of Council of Europe member States, gathering at the Reykjavik Summit in May 2023<sup>1</sup>, mandated the Council of Europe to continue efforts to counter these fundamental challenges. Setting standards to protect human rights, nowadays threatened by the swift developments in areas such as artificial intelligence or the environment, are therefore high among the Organisation's priorities. Building on its expertise and variety of tools, the Council of Europe is indeed best placed to support both its member and non-member States in addressing global challenges.

In an era marked by increased populism and democratic disengagement, the youth play a significant role in defending and promoting the core values upheld by the Council of Europe: human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Beyond being right holders, young people will also determine the shape of tomorrow's societies<sup>2</sup>. The youth perspective, as stressed in the Reykjavik Declaration, contributes to improve the effectiveness of public policies, and strengthen democratic institutions through open dialogue.

Tapping into their potential, the Council of Europe has been actively supporting their engagement in setting and promoting European values and principles. The European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity of the Council of Europe (North-South Centre) has placed youth organisations at the core of its action to support processes of democratic consolidation in member States and in neighbouring regions, mainly through education to democratic citizenship and intercultural dialogue. Indeed, its experience in working with young people in Europe and beyond, and its wide network of youth organisations make out of the North South Centre a unique instrument to contribute to the implementation of the Reykjavik Summit's decisions, by empowering youth organisations to promote a culture based on the principles of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

The Lisbon Forum, a chief event organised by the North South Centre since 1994 provides a platform to exchange on issues of common concern globally, by pooling high-level expertise of the North and the South following the "quadrilogue" approach gathering governments, members of parliaments, elected representatives at the regional and local levels, and civil society.

The [29<sup>th</sup> edition of the Lisbon Forum](#) (16-17 October 2023) dedicated to "Human Rights, Environment and Economic Crimes: Youth at the forefront" aimed to bring a concrete contribution to the implementation of the Reykjavik Summit's decisions and to the Policy

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the results of 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Reykjavik Summit) [here](#)

<sup>2</sup> There are approximately 73.6 million young people aged between 15 and 29 years in the European Union (latest dataset by [Eurostat](#)). Young people in the Middle East and North Africa account for nearly half of the region's population. OECD (2022). *Youth at the Centre of Government Action. A Review of the Middle East and North Africa*. Available [here](#), accessed 27 October 2023

towards Southern neighbouring regions, by empowering youth organisations to promote a culture of rule of law. The conclusions of the Forum stressed the potential of young people in addressing those issues, based not only on their energy and commitment, but also skills, courage and capacity to disrupt status quo. The Forum therefore recommended to create spaces to empower young people and enable interregional collaboration between them. It is in this context that the Council of Europe is launching the Rule of Law Youth Network (RoLYN).

The objective of RoLYN is to increase young people's awareness of and ownership over universal human rights, rule of law and democratic standards, and the potential of youth organisations to act as multipliers of these principles and values through their actions, with a view to increasing their influence over on-going and future reforms and their sustainability.

Focusing on CoE priority objectives selected by the Executive Committee<sup>3</sup> of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe, the RoLYN will involve relevant youth organisations in a network providing a space for targeted training, in-depth dialogue, and meaningful action with a view to promoting the rule of law.

### **2024-2025: Stressing linkages between corruption and environmental degradation**

The CoE Reykjavik Summit held in May 2023 highlighted the urgency of additional efforts to protect the environment, as well as to counter the impact of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Launched as a follow-up to the 29<sup>th</sup> edition of the Lisbon Forum, the work of the RoLYN will focus on promoting and raising awareness on the linkages between corruption and environmental degradation and encourage youth action in this area.

According to data available, besides climate change, corruption is one of young people's main concerns. Moreover, young people are particularly vulnerable to corruption<sup>4</sup>. Even though the climate crisis and environmental degradation are significantly impacting young people's rights and future, surveys on perceptions on corruption by young people do not clearly show how much young people are aware about the impact of economic crime and corruption on the environment, or to what extent young people are fighting corruption and bribery as part of their efforts to combat climate change.

### **Objectives of the network**

By raising their awareness, building their knowledge and their capacities on rule of law issues and standards, and providing them with innovative tools, the RoLYN will empower youth organisations to positively influence anti-corruption, and to be able to advocate for and engage in anti-corruption reforms as agents of change. To this end, the RoLYN will:

- Increase participants' awareness and build their capacities to act as agent of changes, based on Council of Europe standards and tools.
- Support the development of initiatives of the network to act as multipliers in the dissemination of acquired capacities and skills in their communities.
- Provide a space for experience sharing and networking.

RoLYN activities will include in-person and online training sessions and awareness-raising campaigns. Participant organisations will be encouraged to develop follow-up project within their organisations and constituencies.

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<sup>3</sup> The Executive Committee is the decision-making body of the North-South Centre, composed of the four components of the quadrilogue structure of the Centre.

<sup>4</sup> According to the European Commission's Special Eurobarometer on Corruption 2022, 22% of young people aged 15-24 agree that they are personally affected by corruption, with 35% thinking that is it acceptable to give favours, 34% gifts and 25% money. At the global level, previous surveys, revealed similar concerns with, for instance, 30% of young people having accepted a bribe.

## RoLYN 2024-2025 edition

The 2024-2025 edition will be devoted to developing a network of agents of change specialised on anti-corruption, by focusing notably on the linkages between corruption and environmental degradation.

After a selection process, with more than 100 applications received, the RoLYN Network is composed of a group of 20 young people, representatives of youth organisations, youth-led initiatives, associations and/or networks, working on issues related to youth participation, good governance, anticorruption and/or protection of environment at local, national, or international level.

This initiative benefits from voluntary contributions of member states of the CoE North-South Centre and financial support from the South Programme V, a joint initiative between the European Union and the Council of Europe, co-financed by both organisations and implemented by the Council of Europe.



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