

## ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH (CCJ)

12 August 2025

English only

### **CCJ statement on the occasion of the International Youth Day – Safeguarding Youth Civil Society**

Protecting the rights of young people is not optional; it is imperative.

Young Europeans are living through a period of mass change, social upheaval, and instability, a defining time when the commitment to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law is under constant pressure. The Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe expresses its deepest support for fellow youth advocates and activists across Europe, who work tirelessly to uphold these fundamental values.

At a time of mounting instability and democratic decline within Europe, neighbouring regions and increasingly in multilateral spaces, we are witnessing the targeting of activists and civil society actors right before our eyes. Young people are targeted as a consequence of their engagement with international organisations, including the Council of Europe, and for defending core democratic values and human rights standards. We are deeply concerned by the growing restrictions on fundamental freedoms, the shrinking of civic spaces, and the marginalisation of young people from public life. These developments contradict the principles and standards set by member States and enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter, and the Council of Europe's long-standing commitments to youth participation and democratic governance.

In several member States, where democratic backsliding trends have become mainstream, most notably, but not limited to, Georgia, Hungary, Serbia and Türkiye, as noted by the Council of Europe's institutional bodies, we are witnessing the increasing and disproportionate use of legal and administrative measures against civil society actors, and the spread of public narratives, including but not limited to anti-gender, antisemitism, islamophobia and anti-Roma narratives, that stigmatise and harm activists and minorities. These trends have an acute impact on young people, especially those engaged in peaceful advocacy, human rights work, and democratic reform. While each context is different, the broader pattern reflects a worrying disengagement from the democratic and legal standards to which all Council of Europe member States have voluntarily committed and are in international institutional frameworks to uphold.

The Advisory Council on Youth stands in solidarity with youth organisations and activists who continue to face barriers to participation due to their peaceful engagement, views, and/or identity. In the context of peaceful protest, the disproportionate use of force, deliberate targeting and detainment of young protestors as a method of repression is unacceptable. Targeted budget cuts, ongoing online harassment and physical attacks on youth activists have created a perilous environment for youth organisations. As a result, many of them have had to operate under heightened security measures or even go into exile, significantly limiting their ability to function effectively and independently. We underline the urgent need to protect youth civil society and activists from undue pressure, political interference, and the establishment of parallel institutional structures that undermine their democratic legitimacy and independence.

Young people also deserve lasting peace. The Advisory Council on Youth expresses deep concern about the human cost of ongoing armed conflicts, especially the war in Ukraine and Gaza. These crises threaten the lives, rights, and futures of entire generations of children and young people, who are often among the most vulnerable and least protected. In Ukraine, we call for the Council of Europe and its member States to continue their support to young people affected by the war. They need access to safety, education, psychosocial support, and to actively participate in shaping post-war recovery and peacebuilding efforts.

We join the Secretary General<sup>1</sup> and Parliamentary Assembly<sup>2</sup> in calling for the immediate upholding of international humanitarian law and human rights standards, as well as for full and unhindered access to humanitarian assistance in all conflict zones. Following the terrorist attack on civilians carried out by Hamas on 7 October 2023, we are particularly alarmed by the impact of the war in Gaza, tens of thousands of lives lost and the humanitarian situation of the local population. In Europe, the ongoing war has contributed to growing polarisation, with a disturbing increase in both antisemitic and anti-Muslim hate speech and attacks. We are also concerned about the shrinking space for youth organisations, activists, and young people to engage in peaceful protest and advocacy in response to armed conflicts. An environment of fear and division threatens the very fabric of our democratic societies.

Today, the political climate is clearly failing to protect the rights of young people and youth activists. The recent increase in attacks on youth organisations and activists across Europe should serve as a wake-up call to uphold existing protections for young people and take urgent measures to enforce them at the national level. The protection of young people is both a matter of rights enshrined in law and a moral imperative. Young people have historically played crucial roles in social movements and belong at the heart of democratic innovation. Inaction in the face of repression and persecution can and will further damage young people's trust in government and institutions.

Therefore, on this International Youth Day, we call upon member States to uphold their obligations under the Council of Europe Conventions and the political and moral weight of recommendations. Member-states have a duty to support the integrity and expansion of civic spaces, ensure that all youth organisations can participate safely and equally in democratic processes, and condemn hate speech and intimidation targeting youth organisations. Furthermore, we urge support for international accountability mechanisms in situations marked by widespread human rights violations, including those occurring in active and inactive conflict zones.

*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.*

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<sup>1</sup> [Gaza: Secretary General Alain Berset calls for an immediate ceasefire, full and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance, and the urgent resumption of a credible political process](#)

<sup>2</sup> [PACE calls for an end to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza](#)