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ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH (CCJ)

English only

CCJ statement on International Youth Day

Growing barriers and shrinking spaces for youth activism

If you want to understand the state of democracy in a country, look at the state of its young people. Youth has - in an idealised way - been regarded in our societies as a symbol of energy, wellbeing, and drive for change. That said, for many young people across Europe the current situation is often far from aspirational. Growing challenges in accessing social rights, structural cutbacks to support youth organisations and increased threats and violence towards youth and their engagement for issues they believe in, show that being young today is far from easy.

And in a political environment where young people are accused of not caring about anything, many of their peers have paid a price for their activism and political engagement, even with lengthy courtroom processes and prison sentences. Such instances are engraved in our collective memory and continue to remind us that, even today, being a young person taking an active role in the future of our democracies can carry significant personal risk. Yet these attacks also stress the vital role played by young people in the strengthening of our democratic systems.

Young people across Europe have shown, time and time again, that in spite of these barriers we do not give up. Because if we do not fight for our rights and voice our demands for change, who will? All over the Council of Europe member States, millions of young people dedicate their time to volunteering activities in many fields: from cultural activism to politics, from defending human rights to environmentalism. Through that engagement, young people in Europe show their commitment to improving our societies.

Despite facing structural challenges, many young people and youth organisations remain active and engaged in our societies. We do so by working towards building more cohesive, peaceful and inclusive societies, showing how violence and the harsh realities that they face can be overcome. As the Advisory Council on Youth, we call on public authorities in member States to bring concrete, positive change in the conditions of young people who organise for the betterment of our communities. Young people need more allies among decision-makers and institutions. Reliable allies who can create new pathways for the meaningful engagement of youth voices in the spirit of the implementation of the Youth Perspective across Europe and in member States.

Thus, the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe wishes to use International Youth Day 2026 to show solidarity with young people who push for positive change. Pause, reflect and see how you can use this International Youth Day to become a better ally. Through providing structural support for youth organisations, broadening the avenues for meaningful youth participation and youth perspectives across all policy areas and innovating together with young people. This is how we enable those fighting for a better society for all.

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