COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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CCJ statement
From global commitments to European legal action: the Advisory Council on Youth calls for a binding right to a healthy environment

At COP31 in Antalya, high level actors have once again highlighted that the climate crisis is also a human rights crisis. As the conference draws to a close, the CCJ calls for global declarations on the need to advance the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment to be anchored in the European legal framework. COP pledges ultimately depend on political will and changing priorities, whereas a human right enshrined in an international treaty would provide a lasting legal guarantee. A standalone Convention is the missing step to address the human rights implications of the triple planetary crisis in Europe.

Ahead of the meeting of the Rapporteur Group on Human Rights (GR-H) of the Committee of Ministers on 24 November, we therefore call on the Council of Europe Member States to support the launch of an intergovernmental preparatory process. We also call on them to mandate the Steering Committee on the Environment (CDENV) to initiate the drafting of a standalone Convention on the Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment.

The urgency is unprecedented. Europe is warming twice as fast as the global average [1] with the impacts already visible and lived [2]. Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution threaten fundamental human rights, affecting young people's health, dignity, equality and ability to live in a safe environment. Although we have contributed least to this crisis, we will bear its costs throughout our lives. Yet we are not only among those disproportionately affected: we are delegates, organisers, researchers, litigants and environmental defenders, actively driving climate action. Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 calls for support for young people's action, their effective participation in climate decisions and the protection of their rights, recognising a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as essential to the full enjoyment of their human rights.

The European region is lagging behind. In July 2022, the United Nations General Assembly recognised this right as a universal human right through Resolution 76/300. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has affirmed that a healthy environment is both a human right in itself and essential to the full enjoyment of children's rights. The right has furthermore been recognized by all other major regional human rights systems [3]. While several Council of Europe member States already recognise this right in their national frameworks, Europe still lacks a region-wide instrument explicitly guaranteeing it.

[1] C3S/ECMWF and WMO (2026), *European State of the Climate 2025*
[2] The summer of 2026, the hottest on record in Western Europe, saw over 50,000 heat-related deaths in European cities, around two-thirds attributable to climate change according to the 2026 study of the Imperial College London and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine *Heat-related urban mortality attributable to human-induced climate change in Europe in summer 2026* published in Nature Health
[3] Including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Article 24), the Protocol of San Salvador (Article 11) and the Escazú Agreement in the Americas, the Arab Charter on Human Rights (Article 38) and the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration

The Council of Europe has laid the foundations. The Reykjavík Summit of 2023 and the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment (2025–2030) have established a basis for stronger action. The European Convention on Human Rights has provided essential avenues for addressing environmental harm through existing human rights protections. The European Court of Human Rights' judgment in *Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland* further demonstrates this link. However, an autonomous right would go beyond the protection offered through existing case law and bring legal certainty, democratic legitimacy, a comprehensive protection and a common European framework.

The momentum for a Convention is growing. On 1 October 2026, following a debate to which members of the Advisory Council on Youth contributed, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted Resolution 2679 (2026) and Recommendation 2316 (2026), calling on the Committee of Ministers to begin drafting, without further delay, a legally binding instrument recognising the autonomous right to a healthy environment at Council of Europe level. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities echoed this call in Recommendation 566 (2026), adopted on 29 October, while the Secretary General, the PACE President and the Commissioner for Human Rights have voiced support for a standalone Convention. This momentum is further reflected in the 2026 Manifesto by European Children and Youth, developed by the Council of Europe Campaign for the Right to a Healthy Environment, which brings together over 500 organisations.

We envision a Convention that is science-based and future-proof, drawing on existing international and regional standards, with clear State obligations and a regular review mechanism. It must protect present and future generations, those most exposed (taking intersectional vulnerabilities into account) and environmental human rights defenders. It must guarantee access to information, meaningful participation, justice and effective remedies. It must ensure accountability through independent monitoring and transparency through public reporting, with the structured and meaningful involvement of civil society and youth, including the CCJ, alongside environmental human right defenders and relevant human rights bodies throughout its development, implementation and follow-up.

After decades of discussions around the right to a healthy environment in Europe, the time for declarations has passed. The Council of Europe now has a historic opportunity to turn its commitment to human rights and environmental protection into a concrete legal guarantee.

The Advisory Council on Youth stands ready to contribute to this work, with and for the young people of Europe.

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