



ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH

26 September 2020

English only

The European Day of Languages

The European Day of Languages, initiated by the Council of Europe, is held each year on 26 September. It provides an opportunity to celebrate Europe's rich linguistic and cultural diversity and to encourage lifelong language learning as a tool for intercultural dialogue.

The Advisory Council on Youth supports the Council of Europe's position that "linguistic diversity is a tool for achieving greater intercultural understanding and a key element in the rich cultural heritage of our continent."¹

On this European Day of Languages, the Advisory Council on Youth highlights the importance of recognising **the linguistic diversity and the contribution of minorities to the cultural wealth of Europe**. Languages, traditions and cultural assets must be preserved and fostered if the future of Europe's unique linguistic context is to be ensured.

With its Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Council of Europe has developed instruments and tools to promote the implementation of language rights, advance pluralism and safeguard diversity. Yet, the cultural diversity of Europe and implementation of the rights of minorities still present fundamental challenges. We would like to draw attention to the fact that even long before the health pandemic, **restrictions and limitations on the use of minority languages in public life and media, as well as education in minority languages**, have been observed.² With the evolution of the pandemic, the enjoyment of the rights of minorities using less widely spoken languages and the languages of migrants, have drastically deteriorated. We have seen how vital health measures, instructions and guidelines, when offered in more than the official language of the country, have been for the protection of communities.

The role of young people remains crucial in defending a society built on principles of pluralism and diversity. For young people, and especially those from minority and marginalised groups, it is of great importance to use one's own language, as it not only **protects their individual identity, the development of their self-representation and self-pride, but also their participation in public life and engagement in intercultural dialogue and democratic values**. In order to enable individuals to fulfil their potential in their native language(s), it is crucial to combine human rights mechanisms with instruments on minorities' rights and the protection of the languages themselves.

The Advisory Council on Youth reinforces its commitment to the protection of linguistic and cultural diversity, the recognition of intercultural understanding and democratic citizenship of young people, as well as the promotion of social cohesion and mutual respect through the role of non-formal education and quality language education.

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.

¹ <https://edl.ecml.at/> (accessed on 17 September 2020).

² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/country-specific-monitoring> (accessed on 17 September 2020).