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Our Rights, Our Lives

Message from the ENTER! Youth Week

We, young people and youth workers from all Council of Europe member states and beyond, have come together at the *Enter!* Youth Week to discuss **Our Rights** and **Our Lives**. In the light of the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe, we have reflected on our lived experiences and drafted this message to highlight our priorities and call upon member states to guarantee the protection of our rights.

Our Rights

We are a generation committed to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We have a right to an active role in shaping our Europe and planet. All young people must have equal access to their rights recognized in the European Convention of Human Rights and the European Social Charter, irrespective of their background or place where they live. We are concerned that this is not a lived reality for all of us: many young people face barriers in accessing social rights, especially those coming from disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Our Lives

The protection of our rights must be safeguarded and extended. Human rights, in particular, social rights, are being challenged by economic, social, political and environmental crises. These include growing social inequalities, the rise of populism and authoritarian regimes, rise of hate speech, hate crime, radicalisation and mistrust in democratic institutions, lack of action on climate change and increasing discrimination of refugees and migrants and persisting exclusion of Roma and Travellers.

We live in very diverse countries and communities but face many similar challenges in accessing our rights. The realities of young people are often determined by multiple discrimination, disenfranchisement and marginalisation, on the basis of age, gender and sexual orientation and identity, disability, citizenship, ethnicity, religion and belief, languages or places where they live.

Challenges of accessing our rights include, but are not limited to, the following:

Meaningful youth participation in democratic decision-making remains an exception for most of us. We are worried that often we are not taken seriously by authorities in our countries at the local, regional and national level. Our voices and ideas are disregarded and decisions about us are taken without us. Too many restrictions exist on our rights to organise, demonstrate and advocate for our rights.

It is often difficult for us to access decent jobs. Many young people are in unpaid internships, low-paid and precarious work. Economic uncertainty restricts young people's access to other social rights and impacts our physical and mental wellbeing.

In many countries, education systems have outdated curricula and teaching methods. Human rights education is often lacking. Due to insufficient financial support and hidden costs of education, many of us can not focus fully on our studies. The quality of career guidance is often poor and prejudiced, and for the most disadvantaged of us, options for further education and training are severely limited.

For many of us, quality health care remains inaccessible due to costs and insufficient youth-friendly provision in many neighbourhoods. The lack of mental, reproductive and sexual health services is particularly concerning to young people.

Young people suffer from the lack of decent and affordable housing in their transition to adulthood. Private rents are often expensive and there are shortages of affordable and accessible housing. As a result, homelessness is a reality for too many of us.

There are not enough inclusive public spaces for arts, sports and leisure activities and youth work and non-formal education, especially in rural communities. Young people often experience a lack of youth-friendly information and counselling services preventing their access to social rights.

Accessible, affordable and regular transport services are not available to many young people. The right to freedom of movement is furthermore not guaranteed for all of us.

Access to our rights is being threatened the destructive effects of climate change on the livelihoods of many young people and their families across the world. We are very worried that our protests and the interconnections between human rights and environmental problems are not taken seriously by authorities.

Our Europe, our Planet

We come from different countries and have different backgrounds and share a common vision for a life in dignity, an inclusive Europe and a sustainable planet. None of the problems that we face in our lives are inevitable.

We demand member states and all national, regional and local authorities:

- To fully implement the ENTER! Recommendation¹ and other Council of Europe recommendations on young people's access to rights.
- To call upon local authorities to have local review processes of the ENTER! Recommendation with the active involvement of young people and youth organisations.
- To inform young people about their rights and how to access them.
- To provide public services and infrastructure accessible to all without discrimination.
- To support youth organisations and youth work in their efforts to advance our rights.
- To ensure the participation of young people in democratic decision-making and all spheres of life.

We urge the Council of Europe:

- To increase pressure on member states to promote and implement the ENTER! Recommendation and other instruments on young people's access to rights.
- To mainstream the ENTER! Recommendation across all bodies of the Council of Europe.
- To monitor the implementation and follow-up of the ENTER! Recommendation and the outcomes of the ENTER! Youth Week, and to highlight good practices of implementation.
- To support and strengthen the Youth Sector of the Council of Europe and to allow for more regular activities like the ENTER! Youth Week.
- To continue supporting youth workers, youth organisations and youth activists in their work for the advancement of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.
- To advocate for national, regional and local authorities to involve young people in all political decision-making, such as by implementing structures of co-management.
- To support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We demand that all young people must be taken seriously and recognized as active participants in democratic decision-making about all aspects of our lives. We, young people, are not just actors of the future, but also of the present. We call upon the Committee of Ministers to recognize and act upon this message, other outcomes and good practices of the ENTER! Youth Week. Young people and youth organizations must be at the centre of shaping a better future for our rights, our lives, our planet!

¹ Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 on Access to Social Rights of Young People from Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods