

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people and the youth sector Speaking Notes of the CCJ and CMJ Chair

The Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) is a structure of 30 youth activists, appointed by the Committee of Ministers to advise on issues related to youth matters. It's a very advanced system, and one of the only ones in the world that allows for meaningful youth participation. It is working on the principle of consensus, co-managing the work of the Youth Department together with governmental representatives of ministries responsible for youth from the 50 member states of the Council of Europe and signatories of the European Cultural Convention (ECC).

Young people and youth organisations were hit quite hard by the pandemic. Youth are a diverse, heterogeneous and, at times, vulnerable group of society, one of the first ones to be impacted by the pandemic. While young people have not been as affected by the virus itself, youth have been disproportionately affected by the secondary effects of the pandemic. More than one in six young people have had to stop working, not to speak of disruptions in education, or the challenges for those entering the labour market in the current situation. All of it coupled up with mental health issues caused by uncertainties about the future world.

Crippled by lack of funding, youth organisations kept on being the beacon of light for many. Offering frontline support, carrying the new online world forward with their innovative and entrepreneurial skills, supporting deprived and bereaved young people struggling with their mental health, all whilst holding those in power accountable.

Youth organisations are struggling - more than before, to attract new members and maintain existing ones. They struggle to get young people active and equip them with skills needed to defend their rights and prosper. Young people are falling behind from our model of democracy, being just passive bystanders in systems they feel they cannot influence. Their marginalisation continues day by day.

But there is still hope - and this is where organisations as the Council of Europe will be put to the test of time - new innovative initiatives have the potential to energise Europe and its young citizens and bring hope back into what, thanks to the pandemic, seems to be a very broken democratic system.