



20 June 2020

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON YOUTH

English only

World Refugee Day

"i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun"
- from the poem "Home", by Warsan Shire

On this World Refugee Day, the Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe urges the member states to recognise and act upon the severe situation facing young refugees in camps, and invites them to urgently move forward with the implementation CM/Rec(2019)4 on supporting young refugees in transition to adulthood.

More than three quarters (77.3%) of first-time asylum seekers in the EU-27 in 2019 were younger than 35 years old. Those in the age range 18–34 years accounted for slightly less than half (47.0%), while almost one third (30.3%) were minors aged less than 18 years. In this context, we welcome that **some countries opened their borders to unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors**, which enabled their relocation from the infamous Moria Camp on the Greek island of Lesbos. **Much more action is necessary** in order to ensure safe transition to adulthood of young refugees living within Europe's borders.

The support for young refugees is vitally important also given the current situation (amidst the **COVID-19 crisis**) when a shift in public attention away from the issues of refugees has been observed. The Advisory Council on Youth underlines that the current health crisis should not be **used – whether by design or by default – to further the miserable situation** of asylum-seekers and refugees through violence on the borders or the unnecessary and unlawful relocation of refugees which infringes on human rights and human dignity, and dishonours member states' obligations to respect international treaties.

During Coronavirus-linked school closures in Europe, when young Europeans could not attend school regularly, we witnessed remarkable creativity and efficiency in the member states in terms of finding solutions to ensure young people's access to education and mental well-being, in the absence of their usual social environment. At the same time, it is striking that even after *years* of continuous refugee influx, many member states are still failing to ensure not only access to education but also to basic human rights for young refugees, such as the possibility to access health systems or even maintain an essential level of hygiene. The Advisory Council on Youth insists that the member states **recognise and act on the severe consequences of detention in refugee camps and lack of access to education for young refugees' development, dignity, mental health and transition to adulthood** – and act to provide equal access to educational services for everyone no matter their social and legal status or citizenship.

Until their basic needs are met and fundamental rights are fully respected, refugees remain one of the most vulnerable groups, during and beyond the Covid-19 crisis. In a time when European countries proclaim the need for solidarity with each other, the Advisory Council on Youth deplores the negligence and violence against refugees and **calls for immediate and appropriate allocation of funds and structures to ensure young refugees' access to rights.**

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.