

Democracy and Human Rights *in Times of Crisis* – the **Contribution of Young People**

Youth Conference of the **German Delegation of the
Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe**
in cooperation with the German Federal Youth Council

Final Declaration



**DEMOCRACY
HERE NOW**

30 November - 2 December 2022

Berlin

Introduction

From 30. November to 02. December 2022, over 60 youth representatives from National Youth Councils met in Berlin to participate on the conference „Democracy and Human Rights in Times of Crisis- the Contribution of Young People“.

They represented more than 25 countries and were joined by the Advisory Council on Youth on the Council of Europe.

The conference took place in the framework of the ‚Democracy Here | Democracy Now‘ campaign by the Youth Department of the Council of Europe. The conference was initiated and hosted by the German Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in close cooperation with the German Federal Youth Council and the Council of Europe.



Deutscher Bundestag



Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



DEUTSCHER
BUNDESJUGENDRING

Introduction

The participants of the international youth conference stressed that the threats to democracy today are particularly serious because of the accumulation of factors and crises.

The ongoing armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has catalyzed many of these challenges and contradictions. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic continues to be noticeable, also in terms of restrictions on rights and individual life situations. The pressure on (young) civil society was already high before the intensifying crises and is increasingly worrying.

In this final declaration, the participants recall that all processes to revitalize democracy must start with the respect and thorough implementation and regular monitoring of existing Council of Europe standards, and lead to their further development.

Final Declaration – Health Crises

- Address information and digital divide especially regarding marginalised groups of society, creating youth-friendly accessible information services about health crises and strengthening formal and non-formal education to increase internet and media literacy
- Through securing cooperation between the relevant authorities and civil society representatives, create monitoring and action groups to prevent and address the domestic and intimate partner violence

Final Declaration – Health Crises

- Involve young people in crises management, include at least one representative of National Youth Councils on every relevant level in the task force. Involve the perspectives, voices and realities of young people in the debate and decision-making processes
- Ensure a human-rights-based approach in political decisions in the public health. Put young people's needs above private interests. Make healthcare services affordable, i.e. health-related goods and services (masks, tests, medication etc.), especially in the times of crisis; Ensure the monitoring opportunities for the civil society.
- Volunteers should be protected and provided with the proper insurance, safety measures and equipment in their work, and support them to better their services and actions.

Final Declaration – Health Crises

- Establish and increase timely accessibility to the mental health services for young people and train mental health professionals on youth realities and situations and contemporary human rights issues (for example HELP course for mental health professionals).
- Create programmes to reduce stigma on mental health issues and increase research on the rising numbers of mental health issues among young people.
- Consider intersectionalities while developing youth policies and services (including tackling mental health issues).

Final Declaration – Shrinking Spaces

- Develop a mechanism for structural institutional communication and cooperation between the civic society and the Council of Europe using the means of preparing a shadow periodic report complementary to the mandate of the rapporteur.
- Implement a Council of Europe Youth Taxonomy (similar to Youth Test introduced by the European Youth Forum (YFJ)) that will ensure evaluation of all of the recommendations and policies discussed within PACE in coordination with the Joint Council on Youth/the youth civil society.
- Implement regular youth conferences/events taking place in different countries in cooperation with PACE members and NYCs in order to discuss relevant topics for youth (civil society).

Final Declaration – War and conflicts

Raise the visibility and capacity of the CoE

- We urge the national delegations of the PACE to get in touch with the CoE Youth Department, learn about and promote the concept of Co-Management on local and regional level.
- We call for more resources provided by the member states of the Council of Europe for Peacebuilding und Reconciliation work. This work should be conducted by the CoE Youth Department in close cooperation with young people. Also funding for projects through the European Youth Foundation should be increased. Member states should ensure to build up/support infrastructures of youth organisations.

Final Declaration – War and conflicts

During war:

- PACE delegations should communicate directly with Youth organisations and Youth civil Society to quickly respond to their needs. A quick-response task force advising the Parliamentary Assembly should be established between the Youth Department, the Subcommittee on Education, Youth and Sports and Committee on Migration, Refugees and displaced persons.
- Youth Organisations should be heard when it comes to define and uphold the standards in regards to the situation in Refugee camps. Create an action plan for youth in crisis for the future

Final Declaration – War and conflicts

Peacebuilding und Reconciliation

- Actively involve young people and local communities in contributing to peacebuilding activities.
- Strategy of reconciliation that includes stakeholders and funding for creating meeting platforms.
- The creation of a mental health aid system that will focus on youths affected by the war and/or crisis.

Upholding Human Rights

- Specialised persons that can come to aid youths to keep on exercising their right to education during war. There needs to be an assurance that youth will be educated during the war as a fundamental human right as seen in Art.2 of Protocol no. 1 ECHR.
- During a war or conflict in Member State countries the youth structures automatically become places where young people can continue to develop themselves/studying, etc./ if the original structure/school, university, etc./ becomes unavailable for usage/damaged,destroyed,etc./

Remarks on Meaningful Youth Participation

Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Young people are motivated and interested in political issues in our societies, however they find that traditional avenues for participation are not delivering on their promise. Youth civil society has been particularly affected by the shrinking civic space, and yet has been delivering support in times of crisis.

Discrimination of all kinds, along with a general othering and infantilisation of youth, keeps adding barriers to youth engagement with democratic processes and institutions, creating an atmosphere of mistrust and disenfranchisement.

With co-management, the Council of Europe sets an example of good practice for youth participation and is involved in the development and implementation of standards for meaningful youth participation. This example of good practice should be applied especially when it comes to the future of the Council of Europe. The conference demonstrates that young people need the Council of Europe, but the Council of Europe also needs the young generation.

Final remarks

The representatives of the participating national youth councils welcome the fact that the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe is turning to the topic of youth as a partner in order to reflect the importance of youth participation in PACE.

The conference organized by the German PACE delegation in the German Bundestag showed that the cooperation of national parliamentarians and youth representatives can succeed with corresponding initiatives. This connection between national delegations, the youth councils and the Council of Europe should be further strengthened.

The Youth Department of the Council of Europe, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, makes a decisive contribution to this. The further strengthening of this Department is a central component of the involvement of young people and their interests.