

CoD YOUTH FORUM STATEMENT

CONNECTING YOUTH DEMOCRACY LEADERS

Democracy is never a finished process but requires each generation to further develop and enrich its values and principles, including the rule of law and human rights. In this ongoing process, the Warsaw Declaration, adopted in June 2000, continues to define the essential practices and norms for the establishment and consolidation of democracy and emphasizes the interdependence between peace, development, human rights and democracy.

At the same time, the Community of Democracies 20th Anniversary Bucharest Statement adopted on June 26, 2020, on the occasion of the Anniversary Conference held online, reaffirms that **“democratic systems of governance built on respect for human rights, strong institutional capacity, transparency, and trust have the best basis to overcome crises, and build back sustainably.”**

Young people must be acknowledged as the upcoming generation of policymakers and recognized as effective agents of change in democratic systems. Youth empowerment and meaningful participation in leadership and decision-making processes at global, regional, national and local levels, are critical elements to ensuring inclusive, representative, and sustainable democratic societies.

Education is the foundation for creating inclusive, tolerant and resilient societies where the youth recognizes the value of democracy and challenges democratic backsliding. Therefore, **civic education should be mainstreamed and access to formal and informal education strengthened to empower youth**, support their active participation and help them achieve their full potential so that they can fulfil their role as responsible citizens and leaders.

Provided with the necessary skills, opportunities and resources needed to reach their potential, **young people are the driving force for advancing**

implementation, monitoring, and review of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. Given that there are now more adolescents and young people (aged 10-24) than at any other time in history, the engagement of youth in activities contributing to the accomplishment of the 2030 Agenda is central to achieving global sustainability and stability, and to addressing the myriad of threats and challenges to sustainable development, including unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, lack of access to quality education, and conflict.

The 2030 Agenda clearly positions youth as essential partners in global efforts in promoting peace and security. **While youth often participate in building peace from the ground up, they should also be involved in high-level dialogue**, including in mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict, and in peace negotiations, to allow for greater cohesion and impact at all levels.

However, **the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted all aspects of public life**, spanning health, social, economic and political spheres, **affecting young people disproportionately.**

The crisis is having an unprecedented impact on education systems all over the world with far-reaching social consequences. More than 160 countries have implemented closures of educational institutions as a result affecting 1.52 billion of children and youth.

The pandemic has also posed an alarming effect on young people’s mental health. Prolonged periods of closures and movement restrictions may lead to additional emotional unrest and anxieties.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19, violence against women and girls has intensified as security, health, and money worries create tensions and strains accentuated by the cramped and confined living conditions of lockdown.

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Similarly, **the pandemic is likely to disproportionately affect young migrants and refugees** given that more than half of all international migrants are below 30 years of age.

Furthermore, crises such as COVID-19 often compound issues that youth already face. With an estimated rise between 5.3 and 24.7 million in the number of those unemployed globally, **the impact on youth employment is likely to be severe** considering that youth are already three times more likely to be unemployed than adults.

Representing youth organizations and networks, and young people across the world, those of us participating in the Community of Democracies' Youth Forum 2020, convened by Romania, as one of its priorities as the Presidency of the Community of Democracies held for 2019-2021, **call on governments to adhere to the following democratic values and fundamental rights which are of importance to youth**, and in line with the Warsaw Declaration principles:

Inclusion - Young people are a crucial asset in states' development, their inclusive participation in decision-making at all levels contributes to strengthening government's accountability and transparency. (Principles 2 and 16)

Human rights - Youth should fully enjoy all human rights - civil, cultural, economic, political and social. Promoting these rights means addressing the specific challenges and barriers youth face. (Principle 19)

Diversity - Young people constitute a heterogeneous group. Young people as a whole should be meaningfully engaged in society, have a right to equal protection of the law, and be free from any bias (Principle 10). Youth diversity is a strength.

Equality - Reducing social, political, and economic inequalities will allow to unleash the potential of youth to contribute to society. The unemployment rate among young people is a crucial driver of inequality that should be addressed. Education is central to development and to the improvement of the lives of young people globally. (Principle 6)

Freedoms - All young people around the globe should be able to participate in public life and enjoy fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Principle 5); freedom of opinion and of expression (Principle 4); freedom of peaceful assembly and association (Principle 9).

Youth should enjoy all the benefits that democracy has to offer, but without rule of law, independent judiciary, transparent and accountable governments acting in the constitutional framework, it won't be possible. (Principles 12-18) The CoD is an exclusive platform dedicated to strengthening democracy and that is our power to boost further democratization of the world - by the people, for the people and with the people.

Youth are a key element of inclusive societies and strong democracies. Transparent and accountable democratic institutions are crucial to facilitate young people's participation in public life and decision-making.

Ensuring youth access to all democratic processes is an investment in a sustainable future. As democracy is an ongoing process of adaptability, resiliency, and commitment, **We, the young people are committed to being partners in pursuing this path, and help safeguard democracy to attain a prosperous future for all.**