

Youth Partnership

Partnership between the European Commission
and the Council of Europe in the field of Youth



Research Symposium

Young people's access to social rights

15-17 September 2026

European Youth Centre Strasbourg

Call for abstracts

Deadline: 18th of May 2026

Background

Young people's access to social rights, in relation to education and training, employment, health, housing, participation and essential services, is an area of concern highlighted by youth organisations and European Union and Council of Europe member States. In the current context of deepening social inequalities, economic uncertainty, and political mistrust, it is critical to ensure that social policies have a meaningful and positive impact on young people, especially given the clear link between access to social rights, social justice, democratic stability, and social cohesion. It is also essential to consider the situation of marginalised young people, particularly those encountering 'extreme exclusion', who face additional barriers. There is increasing concern about 'intergenerational fairness' and the need to strengthen dialogue and support across generations. Within this framing, 'access' extends beyond formal or legal entitlements to young people's lived ability to claim, navigate and benefit from social rights amidst narratives of 'deservingness', experiences of stigma, and institutional gatekeeping.

Improving living conditions across Europe, particularly for young people, is a longstanding priority of both the Council of Europe and the European Commission. This focus is rooted in key strategic and policy frameworks:

- Council of Europe reaffirms its commitment to young people's rights through the [Council of Europe's youth sector strategy 2030](#) (priority "Access to rights"), the [European Social](#)

[Charter](#), the [ENTER! Recommendation](#), and the [Reference framework for a youth perspective](#).

- European Commission places a priority on young people's rights through the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#), the [EU Youth Strategy \(2019-2027\)](#) and related [European Youth Goals](#), particularly Goals 3 "Inclusive societies", 5 "Mental health and well-being", 7 "quality employment for all", 8 "quality learning" and the youth mainstreaming approach.

Through the [EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership](#) – the co-operation programme between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the field of youth – the two partner institutions have further explored the topic of young people's access to social rights through a range of studies, publications and events. These include the study [Finding a place in modern Europe \(2015\)](#), the [Review of the documents on young people's access to rights and non-discrimination: A Desk Research Study \(2021\)](#), [Issue #29 of Coyote magazine \(2019\)](#), the [Perspectives on Youth](#) publication series, the [Symposium \(Un\)Equal Europe? Responses from the Youth Sector \(2016\)](#) and the [Symposium Navigating Transitions: adapting policies to young people's changing realities \(2022\)](#).

Building on this context, the EU-Council of Europe Youth Partnership will organise a **[Research Symposium on young people's access to social rights from September 15th to the 17th 2026, at the European Youth Centre in Strasbourg](#)**. It will gather up to 80 participants, including academics and researchers, policymakers and representatives of youth organisations. The Symposium is prepared in close co-operation with a [scientific committee](#), consisting of 12 experts in the area of youth social rights.

In preparation of the Symposium, we welcome contributions from early career and more senior researchers, policy makers committed to evidence- and rights-based youth policy development, who have carried out research-based analyses of their work, and practitioners (including activists) involved in supporting young people in accessing their social rights.

Around 12 contributions will be invited to submit chapters for the [Youth Knowledge book: Young People's Access to Social Rights in Europe: State of Research and Key Debates](#) (to be published in 2027).

The Concept of the Symposium

The Symposium aims to advance the understanding of the state of young people's social rights in wider Europe. It examines the situation of access to rights and the circumstances that enable or limit young people's engagement with social rights. In the context of commitments to intergenerational fairness and social justice, both at the European and national levels, and the challenges facing young people now, especially around AI, technology, security and the climate crisis, a critical understanding of the lived reality rather than the rhetoric of social rights is imperative.

The Symposium will bring together and discuss young people's social rights from social, economic, legal, and political science perspectives, with the goal of supporting effective policy development and youth work practice. It will be structured around the thematic areas of the Council of Europe's **ENTER Recommendation**, and its review, which links with young people's living conditions, housing, education and training, employment, access to healthcare,

participation, information and leisure/sports/culture, and keeping in mind the objectives of the [European Commission's Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness](#). We are looking for research that connects these dimensions, and that examines the effects of the deteriorating living conditions on many young people's lives.

What type of submissions are we looking for?

We welcome contributions from diverse disciplines, including, but not limited to Sociology, Political Sciences, Gender Studies, European Studies, Economics and Psychology. We also appreciate submissions from practitioners (including activists), and policymakers who have carried out research-based analyses of their work. These may include studies that go beyond traditional academic conventions.

We especially encourage submissions that adopt a **European, cross-national or comparative perspective**, although case-studies of broader relevance are also possible. We also welcome theory-building contributions on youth social rights, innovative conceptual frameworks, and intersections between inequality, institutions, lived experiences, and youth (re)actions.

The Symposium will encourage dialogue among academics and professional communities from the youth sector, including the representatives of the European institutions, national/ regional/ local youth policy-makers, youth work practitioners and representatives of youth civil society organisations. To foster interaction, it will include plenary and parallel sessions, as well as round tables.

An indicative (but not exhaustive) list of possible themes include:

Access to social protection and quality public services

- The **uptake of social services** (including welfare benefits) from the perspective of institutions and potential clients, including barriers related to, for example, class, gender, ethnicity, disability and age;
- The implications of the **erosion of public and youth services**, with reliance on civil society organisations for service delivery (for example, mission drift, fragmentation, metric-driven interventions).
- **Institutional stereotyping/ neglect/ exclusion** of certain young people from services (i.e. 'deserving' and 'non-deserving' welfare recipients) vs the imperatives of the European Court of Human Rights. Young people's (re)actions to these processes (i.e. agency and search for dignity; self-exclusion; eroded trust in social services).
- The implications of the use of **AI**, of **digitalisation of services**, and of increased reliance on digital solutions and external consultants.

Access to education and training

- **Barriers** faced by disadvantaged young people (i.e., financial, infrastructure-related, geographic, cultural, digital).
- **Quality and relevance of learning**: how curricula equip young people for social, political and economic participation?
- Analysis of **policy trends** (i.e. underinvestment in teachers' preparedness relative to equipment and technology; policy responses on early school leaving)

- **Inclusive and equitable learning environments** in relation to diverse young populations.
- **Learning beyond formal schooling:** lifelong learning, youth work, digital.
- Youth **participation in decision making** on education and training policies.

Access to health services

- Youth **health transitions**. How does the health status of today's youth compares with previous generations and what does this say about the opportunities and challenges they face?
- **Social determinants** of physical and mental health and wellbeing, including disparities among different social groups in relation to healthcare. Contributions may elaborate on work-life balance, living standards, access to quality and youth-friendly healthcare, environmental justice, consumer society, stressors, lifestyle choices.

Access to housing

- **Housing crisis and the rising cost of living** (issues of legal security, affordability, accessibility and safety).
- The implications of **urban development, gentrification and rural-urban migration** for social rights (i.e. informal settlements, inadequate public housing and policy gaps).
- Connections of **housing with other social rights** (i.e. health, education, work, participation).

Access to employment

- **Quality of jobs and in-work poverty**. Emerging forms of career and **services for career development**. Rights and protections in new work arrangements. Young people's (re)actions and policy responses holding corporations accountable for risks incurred by young people.
- Age, gender, race, class, disability and their intersections at work.
- Interrogations of the **neoliberal discourses** around individualisation of failure, deficit of aspirations and skills.

Access to participation

- Youth participation in contexts **without structures enabling trust**, solidarity and conviviality (i.e. precarious employment, temporary housing, commercialisation of public spaces).
- Analyses of **mobilizations and struggles** for rights by young people and youth organizations.
- Access to rights and funding for youth organisations and the risk of retaliation. How **youth organisations** mobilise to defend the rights, or ask for new rights; How the process of youth policy making looks in practice (a session will be dedicated to organisations' experiences in relation to youth rights).
- **The spectrum of political orientations** of young people. Digital participation, issue-based activism. The 'un-organised youth', disillusionment, silent angers and political withdrawal.
- The rise of online communities and narratives, including the gender backlash.
- Youth **(sub)cultures and identity** (i.e. citizenship, sexuality, authenticity)

Access to social rights for minority social groups

- The **backlash and attacks on social rights**, including a historical perspective on how these currents emerged and are connected to broader erosion of democracy.
- **Policies and politics of social rights**: moral panics against (gendered) minority groups, movements incriminating the welfare beneficiaries, polarised narratives.
- Minority **young people's perspectives** on social rights and their institutional uptake. How to enable minority social groups to claim and defend their rights? Allies and possible resources.
- How to reach and involve disadvantaged young people? **Culturally competent interventions**. What works? What sounds promising and what does not work (with a group, in a context)?

Access to sport, leisure, and culture

- **Opportunities and barriers** to participate in sport, leisure and culture. To what extent and for whom are these experiences affordable, inclusive, safe and of quality?
- What are young people's **experiences of public spaces**? How is the interplay between policy making, commercial interests and young people's needs enacted?

Transversal issues to be incorporated in contributions: e.g. gendered experience of social rights and overall intersectional approach, spanning class, race, rurality, migrant/ refugee status, disability, overseas territories/former colonies etc.

As a general principle, we encourage presentations that do not regard the above rights (or their absence) in isolation, but intertwined (i.e. the relationship between work, housing, health and civic participation) and integrated in broader, lifelong perspectives. We see the Symposium as a space for dialogue across the spectrum of established and aspiring social rights.

Process and Timeline

Deadline for abstracts:

The abstracts should be submitted by 18 May 2026 through [the following form](#).

Your submission should include:

- Proposed title;
- Abstract outlining the main research findings, with some indication of the research methodology (maximum 350 words);
- Theme of the Symposium under which the abstract is submitted;
- Full names and biographies of author/s (max.150 words per author);
- Institutional affiliations of author/s, if any;

The Scientific committee will make selection decisions by mid-June 2026 for symposium presentations and book contributions. Around 12 applicants will be invited to submit full chapters by mid-November 2026). The book will be published in 2027 under the '[Youth Knowledge](#)' series. The selection will prioritise research contributions drawing on comparative or European-wide data.

Key dates:

- 18 May: deadline for abstracts.
- Mid-June: selection of contributions.
- 15-17 September 2026: Symposium, European Youth Centre, Strasbourg.
- 15 November: deadline for chapter submission.
- 2027: Publication of the Youth Knowledge book, compiling the most relevant and insightful contributions from the Symposium.

Participation:

No conference fees; all costs related to travel, accommodation, and meals are covered by the Youth Partnership. Participants are expected to attend for the full duration of the event.

For any queries addressed to the Youth Partnership, please contact Lana Pasic (lane.pasic@partnership-eu.coe.int).