

# MINORITY YOUTH IN EUROPE: A STATE OF PLAY





# YEN JEV

Youth of European Nationalities

Jugend Europäischer Volksgruppen

## Minority Youth in Europe: A State of Play

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Even though the team working on this report worked with the utmost care in gathering and processing the information, errors in this report may occur.

Additionally, the report reflects the state of play in the years 2018-2020 and the situation on the ground might have changed since then.

For this we ask for your understanding, and we kindly ask you to contact us under office@yeni.org if you do have concerns or comments.

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*Dear reader, as you have probably noticed, our world is currently undergoing some really important changes, and not all of them are positive...*

*One issue that particularly concerns youth from the network of the Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) is the loss of cultural and linguistic diversity all over the world. This loss of diversity has roots in discrimination, unawareness or even the lack of appreciation and commitment. All these factors force millions of members from ethnic, linguistic and national minorities to stop passing on, deny or neglect parts of their identity. Human civilization needs cultural and linguistic diversity to thrive, innovate, and create. It is the basis on which a bright future for the next generations can be built.*

*But where should we start? How do we proceed? What can a young person do to support this future? It sounds indeed like a big job!*

*Join the four SuperYENies who are committed to the quest of finding great solutions to support young people from minorities and to contribute to a better society! The defender Ruz Tan will make sure everyone's identity is respected, the vigilante Stormblåt will advocate for minority rights, the wise, young and fresh Soari Galbin will show you ways to empower young people and defend the planet and finally the great Zeleń will spread solidarity all over the planet.*

*Follow them through the report and enjoy a great adventure with them!*





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## YEN AND ITS NETWORK

The Youth of European Nationalities (YEN) is the largest European umbrella organisation representing young people that identify as ethnic, national and linguistic minorities in Europe. Since 1984, YEN has been fighting for the preservation and promotion of minority languages, cultures and rights in Europe with a special focus on the interests and needs of youth. As experts in this field, we aim to put youth minority issues on the political agenda and advocate for our member organisations, youth rights and minorities in general.

YEN has 42 member organisations in 19 countries (in November 2020). Member organisations of YEN vary in size and structure. They focus on a variety of activities ranging from culture or language preservation, political activism to non-formal education. All of them aim to provide a space to empower youth from ethnic, national and linguistic minorities. They are democratic, support the aims of YEN and are either youth led or have youth actively participating in all activities of the organisation.

Arbeitsgemeinschaft deutscher Jugendorganisationen in Rumänien | Romania ★ Bulgarian Youth Association of Hungary | Hungary ★ Bund der Jugend der Deutschen Minderheit in der Republik Polen | Poland ★ Udruga hrvatske omladine u Vojvodini | Serbia ★ Consiliul a Tinilor Armanj | Romania ★ Deutsche Jugend in der Ukraine | Ukraine ★ Deutscher Jugendverband für Nordschleswig | Denmark ★ Diverse Youth Network | Hungary ★ Društvo mladih Slovencev v Italiji | Italy ★ Društvo gradišćansko-hrvatske mladine u Ugarskoj | Hungary ★ Elsass-Lothringischer Volksbund Jugendgruppe | France ★ Frysk Ynternasjonaal Kontakt | Netherlands ★ Gemeinschaft Junger Ungarndeutscher | Hungary ★ Giuventetgna Rumantscha | Switzerland ★ Grænseforeningen Ungdom | Denmark ★ Grup dla mendranza ladina | Italy ★ Hrvatski Akademski Klub | Austria ★ Karpatendeutsche Jugend | Slovakia ★ Jugendring der Russlanddeutschen | Russia ★ Junge Spitzen | Denmark ★ Kenstroll Breizh | France ★ Klub slovenskih študentk in študentov na Dunaju | Austria ★ Klub Studencki „Pomorania“ | Poland ★ Koroška dijaška zveza | Austria ★ Lunjina | Serbia ★ Magyar Ifjúsági Értekezlet | Romania ★ Mlada EL | Austria ★ Mladi v odkrivanju skupnih poti | Italy ★ Omladinska mreža Srba u Hrvatskoj | Croatia ★ Organizácia slovenskej mládeže v Maďarsku | Hungary ★ Serbske mlodžinske towarstwo Pawk z. t. | Germany ★ Rökefloose / Jöögedfloose foont Nordfriisk Instituut | Germany ★ Ruotsinsuomalaiset Nuoret Sverigefinsk Ungdom | Sweden ★ Sudetendeutsche Jugend | Germany ★ Südtiroler Jugendring | Italy ★ Sumnal | North Macedonia ★ Sydslesvigs danske Ungdomsforeninger | Germany ★ Union of Hungarian Youth Organisations of Romania | Romania ★ Vajdasági Ifjúsági Fórum | Serbia ★ Vlach Youth Council of Albania | Albania ★ Vlach Youth Council of Macedonia | Macedonia ★ Young Avrupa Batı Trakya Türk Federasyonu | Germany / Greece



## YEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE TERM "MINORITY"

There are different minority groups in society based on a variety of factors such as cultural or national belonging, language, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, migration history, to mention a few. For the purposes of this report, the term minority refers to a group of people in a non-dominant position in society. Although often the case, a minority does not have to be also less in numbers in comparison to the main group in society. The defining characteristics are the relative disadvantage they face compared to the main social group. In the understanding of this report, the term minority refers to the minorities we represent in YEN: national, ethnic

and linguistic autochthonous minorities in Europe. We understand autochthonous national, ethnic and linguistic minorities or groups as communities that came into being as a result of Europe's turbulent history and wars, as a result of the changes of state borders and other historical events. These minorities distinguish themselves from the majority, because of their history, language or cultural heritage. Some of them have never established a state of their own and live as a minority in the territory of a state, referred to as non-kin-state minorities. Today, there are more than 400 national minorities, ethnic groups and linguistic communities to be found in Europe.





## ABOUT THE MINORITY MESSENGERS PROJECT AND THE REPORT

This report was developed as the final step in a three-year project – the Minority Messengers Project run by YEN from 2018 until the end of 2020. The overall aim of the project was to empower minority youth to raise awareness on issues and topics important to them as members of minorities in Europe.

In its first two years, young members of our network (the Minority Messengers) were not only trained in the application of non-formal education tools, but also planned and implemented different workshops all over Europe. All of these small-scale activities aimed to inform and exchange experiences about the life of young people belonging to a minority. The Minority Messengers visited a variety of

youth organisations and youth groups, both from minorities and from mainstream society. They visited schools, participated in activities of other organisations, shared their own knowledge and learned from visited communities. Additionally, YEN implemented a variety of other activities aiming to empower minority youth, encourage exchange and have a positive impact on their knowledge, skills and attitudes. What is more, throughout these three years of the Minority Messengers Project, YEN collected information about the lived experiences, ideas and issues important to minority youth. They form the basis for this report, on which a group of volunteers worked together, to create as the last part of the Minority Messengers Project in 2020.

## AIMS

The process of creating this report was based on reflecting, documenting and expressing the situation, lived realities and issues important to young people from minorities in today's changing societies.

The report provided the opportunity to foster critical thinking processes and empower minority youth to be part of the participatory process through: a) developing their sense of ownership of the process by bringing and incorporating their insights and experiences in the process, and b) making them feel heard by creating an opportunity to make their insights accessible to European institutions and other youth organisations in a sustainable way.

The main force behind the development of the report is the realisation that the situation, needs and ideas of young people from minorities are not clear and known to many policy makers and actors of civil society, including youth organisations that are not focusing solely on minority issues.

With the report we also want to strengthen our position in civil society and the connections with our network, partners and European institutions. By providing an active and meaningful participatory process and thoroughly documenting, analysing and enhancing the outcomes of different activities in the past three years, the report brings the needed “self-representative” perspective and expands on (emerging) issues and challenges that were directly expressed by the youth active in the YEN network.

We see this report offering the ever missed and overlooked minority youth perspective on issues relevant for minority communities as well as society



as a whole. As an international youth organisation focusing on minority youth, we have access to a specific societal group with a double identifier: belonging to a minority and being young. Here we want to express ourselves on topics that minority youth deeply care about, share their concerns on the current situation, present good practices in different areas concerning minorities and youth, as well as make recommendations for the future. The reality of minority youth is a unique and diverse one. The present report tries to explain the mechanisms behind all this.

The report is therefore an articulation of specific issues calling attention to the long-standing challenges faced by minority youth. It should not be read as a manual providing measures and solutions to improving the situation of minority youth but rather as a starting point. We believe that in order to create spaces and opportunities that are participatory, inclusive and diverse, we should not look into the exchange of good practices as an example of a “one-size-fits-all” model but rather as an opportunity to self-reflect on our own practices. For this, first and foremost policy gaps have to be identified and transnational barriers and challenges of minority youth documented, recognized and acknowledged.

To this end, the report offers a perspective on minority youth not only to non-minority members, but also to minority organisations themselves, hopefully starting a broader dialogue on the topic and contributing to a positive attitude on cultural diversity among young people, regardless if they belong to a minority or not.



## METHODOLOGY



This report is the outcome of a youth led process. It is the result of the last stage and final year of the three years of Minority Messengers Project of YEN. A team of eight volunteers from the YEN network

spent more than a year to collect, reflect on, analyse and put into words the outcomes of YEN's work from the years of 2018, 2019 and 2020. A list of sources can be found in the appendix.

### In terms of data collection following methods were used:

1. Desk review of relevant documents based on different information collected by people active in the YEN network throughout 2018, 2019 and 2020. These include:
  - ★ Questionnaires and evaluations of the Minority Messenger visits to minority and other youth organisations in 2018 and 2019.
  - ★ Reports, documentation, feedback and evaluations of workshops and other content-focussed activities organised by YEN or attended by YENies.
  - ★ Information collected through the work of YEN's regular working structures such as resolutions and statements of YEN and its member organisations.
2. The online questionnaires with closed and open questions that was answered by young people identifying as national, ethnic and linguistic minorities on the topics of the climate crisis and discrimination in education.
3. Focus groups based on both guided and open discussions involving different representatives of minority youth organisations.

All information has been anonymized. Throughout this publication, and in our daily work we use the term "YENie" to refer to young people active in our network, such as representatives of YEN or participants of YEN events. Everything that is written about in this report is a reflection of the ideas, issues and thoughts that YENies have shared with the organisation and each other during the various activities in 2018, 2019 and 2020. YENies quoted in this report talk about their lived experiences, needs, and views and have contributed in a valuable way, both at the moment of sharing and for this report. The pronouns used to describe people throughout this report are they/them, and do not differentiate between female, male or non-binary.

The level of representation of different minorities varies, due to the nature of the project and data

collection. Nevertheless, the data shows diverse representation of minority youth members throughout Europe. However, we want to acknowledge that during the events, Roma youth members were underrepresented and that is reflected in the data and the subsequent report. The Romani people form the biggest and the youngest ethnic minority community in Europe living in many different countries. They are also the marginalised group that is most often facing discrimination and exclusion. YEN is dedicated to supporting Roma youth movements and is a partner of several Roma youth organisations. As we are a strong believer of self-representation, and due to the specific situation of Romani people, we invite everyone to get informed about young Roma through their self-representation (ternYpe, Phiren Amenca, ERGO network).

## STRUCTURE



The flow of this report is determined by the themes that led through the documents and reports produced during YEN events 2018-2020. The topics and issues that are currently the most relevant to YENies are presented in the three main chapters. We strive for a diverse society where every voice is heard and being taken seriously, where communities build bridges and stand in solidarity with one another.

The first chapter, *The Complexity of Minority Identity*, explores the meaning and many facets of identity to minority youth. Throughout, questions of the intersectionality as a framework for understanding diversity of identity, factors influencing it as well as means to foster it, arise, combined with concrete recommendations on how to promote the development of minority and youth identity. The following chapters refer to the issues raised in this first chapter, since identification and expression as minority youth is a cornerstone to this report as a whole.

The second chapter, *Minority Rights are Human Rights*, outlines minority youth issues from a legal perspective. Although there are some international reference documents, the legal situation poses a grave obstacle for the promotion and development of minority communities in many aspects.

To achieve full equity and equality within today's European society, we strongly believe in the empowerment of minority youth through strong and sustainable minority youth organisations. The

third chapter, *Youth Empowerment and Strong Minority Youth Organisations*, therefore explores the possibilities of non-formal education methods as a tool for the development and improvement of critical thinking skills. Only empowered minority youth organisations can actively contribute to social change with quality and meaningful participation.

Each chapter has recurring components. These are the introductions, the "Did you know that...?" facts, YEN recommendations, and further readings. The introduction of each chapter will set the outline of what will be discussed in the following (sub)chapter. Second, best practices are shared in the format of "Did you know that...?". These facts are based on the long-running project of YEN – the #YENsday that aims to provide positive and accessible information about minority (youth) topics in Europe. Every Wednesday, YEN shares such #YENsday facts on its main social media channels. Third, recommendations are given at the end of each chapter. These are recommendations of YEN based on the topics, issues, challenges and best practices described. We call on everyone to take these recommendations to heart and carry them out to their own capacities. Finally, each chapter will provide further reading to learn more about the topics described.

At the end of the report, a glossary is added. There, the definitions are given of the terms which are marked in bold throughout the report. In the glossary there is also the list of abbreviations used in the report.



"EVERY PERSON BELONGING TO A NATIONAL MINORITY HAS THE RIGHT TO SELF-IDENTIFICATION AS A MEMBER OF A SPECIFIC COMMUNITY AS WRITTEN IN THE ARTICLE 3 OF THE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES."

# THE COMPLEXITY OF MINORITY IDENTITY





# INTERSECTIONALITY AND MINORITY YOUTH IDENTITY

All **minority youth** that have expressed themselves in YEN events and activities are connected through common experiences. That is, the opportunities and challenges they have and encounter during the exploration, development and expression of their identity as being part of a minority *and* being young.

When speaking about identity we need to think about identity formation and how one's view on society and the world are responsible for the perception of who we are. When being asked "Who are you?", nobody will reply in only one word. Identity itself is multi-layered and cannot be put in one box only. Categorizing to simplify the vast diversity of people in the world is a coping mechanism attempting to understand the complexities of one's and other people's identities, but can quickly become problematic. People label others and based on their upbringing act upon their own perceptions, and project biases, stereotypes and prejudices on the identity and behaviour of others. Nonetheless, everyone's identity is complex and layered in multiple dimensions. It is important however to understand that these layers are not fixed. They are defined by different

factors throughout different stages of life that affect people differently; at some points, some categories are expressed more than others, while in other stages of life different traits become more visible. Only by being open to diversity – by the principles of intercultural dialogue, cross-cultural understanding and awareness building that go beyond a one-dimensional approach to inclusion – one can fully grasp the complexity of identity.

But why is having a strong awareness of one's own identity an asset? The identification and expression as minority youth is the cornerstone to this whole report. Therefore, this opening chapter will explore the theme in depth, while the following chapters will recur on the topics that will be raised here.

Making sense of identity and the feeling of belonging are important features of young people's development, and are critical for their wellbeing, self-pride and confidence. The development of a stable sense of one's self is particularly important for young people belonging to minorities as their identity is formed through the multiplicity of identities, as they need to navigate between different mother tongues, national or ethnic communities or cultures and traditions. Identity formation is an ongoing process of identifying oneself in regard to others, to larger group identities, and the different stages of life and contexts. It is a fluid process of assessing and defining to which extent they feel affiliated or distinctive to these identification markers. The exploration and formation of identity can and should have an empowering effect on youth, but the process may be hampered by a fear to encounter unfamiliarity, judgement, or negative consequences for identifying with a certain or with multiple markers.

Connected to this, YEN believes that any analysis of the fields of minority youth issues needs to be done by taking into account the idea of **intersectionality** and its connection to social inclusion and justice,

**equality** and **equity**. This concept can help communicate the complex realities of multi-layered individuals and experiences of **discrimination** and oppression many young minority youth members encounter in their daily life.

Examples of the impact of intersectionality in regard to minority youth go beyond the questions of **identity** and **representation**. They illustrate specific cases and connections between the deep structural and systemic issues of inequalities and discrimination. Minority youth carry a series of identities that make their individual experiences unique as most of them find themselves on multiple intersections – social and political identities – that in comparison to majority, for members of minorities systematically lead to discriminations rather than to privilege. Additionally, the intersection of various identity traits experienced by youth from national, ethnic and linguistic minority backgrounds has obviously a strong influence on how an individual sees themselves, on the development of self-awareness and on the development of meaningful community engagement.

For a minority identity, the main feature is its pluralism as it is built upon many intersections, such as ethnicity, culture, language, gender, sexuality, ability, education and many more. At the very least, minority youth may identify with three markers to form and continuously develop their unique **pluralistic identity**: being part of a majority, being part of the minority, and being young. To self-identify is part of becoming a confident, empowered human being. It is a constant process of change and growth within new contexts and developments.

However, there is not only the process of self-identification, as others and society at large will identify and label a person too. It is often that minority youth find themselves in an environment that lacks understanding and awareness of the possibility of possessing various identities at the same time. An environment that is eager to label an individual as either/or, and not taking into consideration the complexities and multiple layers of identity. A minority youth member is reminded about their own identity on a daily basis, in many common situations where they have to contemplate whether they can or cannot express their identity and whether they will or will not be accepted for it. **Minority youth are often faced with the assumption of the majority that belonging to an ethnic minority and national identification are mutually exclusive.** "I feel uncomfortable when people want to put me in a box or

want me to choose which nationality I like more," or "I never have an exact answer for the question: where are you from?" These are just some of the powerful illustrations provided by YENies about their every-day struggles regarding their pluralistic identity. The social pressure to identify as either or causes that minority youth frequently feel that they are not completely belonging to either of the spheres. "I am too Slovenian to be Italian, and too Italian to be Slovenian," one of the individuals expressed.

While many factors make up minority youth identity, it is without a doubt that external elements have an impact and shape it to a large extent. Minority youth face discrimination on the basis of their identity. This is why they may be more prone to assimilate to the majority society around them. The assimilation happens on the basis of different external factors that influence how minority members perceive themselves as it will be shown and illustrated in the following pages of this chapter.

The drive to put individuals into distinct boxes and label according to group identity remains an easy solution as there is a lack of knowledge and understanding (or willingness to understand) to appreciate or acknowledge pluralism and the identification as a member of a minority. "Most of the [people] have no clue about minorities and do not even know that they exist," said a YENie. Not only the lack of knowledge and understanding, but also dis- and misinformation or negative perception form barriers for minority youth to express

their self-identification. These barriers are highly problematic, as minority youth may feel ashamed of this part of their identity, which can weaken their personal development and negatively influence their life and wellbeing. This in turn hinders the development of a free, equal, inclusive and democratic society. This concern and wish were also expressed by a YENie: **"Only when everybody can live their identity, a society is democratic and free."** In the

majority of European countries, a lack of an environment can be observed, where diversity is valued, accepted and people are able to express themselves freely. In such an environment, minority youth face challenges and discrimination in the media, in their education, in public life, in their legal rights, in digital opportunities and socio-economic mobility, to just mention a few.

# THE RIGHT TO SELF IDENTITY

## MINORITY IDENTITY AND THE OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF MINORITIES

The lack of legal recognition of a minority and/or minority language greatly influences their position in society and opportunities available for minority youth. If the minority and/or its language is not recognized in any way, there are even fewer means and opportunities for minority youth to learn and explore the minority identity in media, public life, education, or otherwise. Moreover, without recognition, there are barriers to expressing the minority identity, and youth may even not be aware of the existence of issues or barriers that they face as a member of the minority.

Furthermore, even with recognition, minority members often face barriers in accessing and practising their rights. For example, a minority language cannot be used in governmental settings, as officials may only speak in one of the official languages, that is the majority language. There are examples, where although the law obliges municipalities to provide translation of administrative documents into minority or regional languages, this does not happen. Without the official recognition of the language, the individuals

cannot use their language in courts. To further develop this example, the recognition alone does not guarantee the trial to be held in a minority language due to a lack of judges, interpreters and legal translators who know the language. Such is the case of the Romansh community in Switzerland. Next to legal prescriptions, it is also structural aspects such as linguistic awareness and abilities of staff working at the actual court that determine the language of the trial. Even though there is a possibility to use legal interpreters,



there are barriers to do so, for example, when the minority language speaker needs to notify the court well in advance to speak their own language. The number of available interpreters, or the financial costs that need to be paid by the private person, forces the minority members to resort to use the majority language.

What is more, without recognition, the visibility and awareness of this identity marker – being a minority – remains low. The lack of recognition and knowledge on minority rights increases inequality and discrimination of the minority members. For example, a young person may express their minority identity and someone may ridicule them for it, as there is a lack of understanding, ignorance, or even a sense that no such thing may exist at all. Additionally, if a minority is not recognised, it may prove even more difficult for minority youth to report discrimination to official bodies and be taken seriously.

Without the legal recognition of minorities as well as cultural and linguistic diversity, there is a greater chance of inequity, injustice and discrimination.

Every person belonging to a national minority has the right to self-identification as a member of a specific community as written in Article 3 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. An inclusive society where we are all equal in dignity and rights will never be reachable if minorities remain the only ones fighting for minority rights. Minority issues are not only relevant for minorities

themselves, but should be issues of society as a whole. The protection of rights of the most vulnerable in society is vital for ensuring peace and stability around the world. A legal framework that promotes and protects equal opportunities for everybody at all levels remains a crucial mechanism for the prevention of loss of languages and cultures which directly affects the cultural richness of Europe. Official recognition of minorities combats the social exclusion of certain communities and makes sure that political, social, economic and cultural life reflect the diversity of the society by representing all of its members.

As YEN we are aware of this importance of official recognition of minority and minority languages and in our work advocate strongly for recognition of all minorities and an inclusive, diverse and open society.



## DID YOU KNOW...?

...that in 2018 Low Saxon – with around 1.5 million speakers in the Netherlands – was officially recognised by the Dutch government?

...that in 2018, Switzerland has added two more minority languages to the European language charter – Franc Comtois and Francoprovençal?

...that in December 2019 for the first time someone could take their pledge in West Frisian to become a Dutch citizen?

...that a campaign calling for the official recognition and legal protection of Scots language has been launched in 2020?

...that the Czech Parliament is debating an amendment to the law on birth registers that would allow minorities to wed in their own language?

## MINORITY IDENTITY AND FORMAL EDUCATION

In education, we observe an absence or shortcoming of representation and opportunities for minorities. For most youth the **formal educational** system plays a large role in their lives as minority members. However, school curriculums generally lack minority topics. This excludes the participation and recognition of minority members in history and society, and does not allow the youth to be sensitized for minorities and diversity in general. Majority youth are neither taught about the history and existence of minorities, nor are minority youth included and recognised through their absence in the school curriculum.



The importance of representation and recognition through addressing minorities within the school system cannot be stressed enough. At least part of the primary and secondary education — being mandatory — should be accessible for everyone to gain a basic knowledge of society's diversity.

Besides the lack of acknowledgement of diversity in general, schools in many countries fail to recognize the importance of linguistic diversity and do not take into consideration the needs of pupils, nor do they address the need for education on and in the minority languages. Therefore, a pupil with a minority background often needs to embark on a monolingual education system. When their diverse and multilingual background is not acknowledged and valued, children face a lack of understanding, cannot fully incorporate nor develop their multilingualism and multilingual brain, nor the acquisition of their minority language. The formal educational system may judge a linguistic mix-up as a sign of linguistic deprivation of the student, and not as a sign of the pupil's developing multilingual brain. Instead of incorporating and expanding a student's linguistic knowledge on all languages, often a monolingual track is forced upon the student. Just some examples where there is no or severely limited education in the minority languages are: Aromanian in Romania, Alsatian in France, or Lower Saxon in the Netherlands. Unfortunately, this can not only lead to a lack of knowledge and development of the pupil's multilingual brain and their languages, but may also lead to a placement in lower education levels or segregation.



Furthermore, even if the school does provide education in the minority language(s), the pupils may face limitations nonetheless. These limitations could be manifested as: lack of education provided at a few (and lower) levels (e.g. Lower Saxon in the Netherlands); limited financial support due to a lack of legal recognition (e.g. Alsatians and Lorraine Franconians in France); not available or not up-to-date educational material (e.g. Slovene in Italy); implementation of classes outside of regular school hours (e.g. Francoprovençal in Switzerland); exclusion and/or segregation of students according to their background (e.g. Roma in Hungary); a threshold of student numbers required to run a programme or class (e.g. Kashubian in Poland); a shortage of teachers (e.g. Gaelic in Scotland); restrictions for students to attend specific schools or programmes due to geographical distances and a limited transport infrastructure within the region as well as legal restrictions connected to the teaching of minority languages outside of it (e.g. Bretons in France). This puts a spotlight on the state of the education of minority languages in Europe, that remain forgotten, forbidden or unavailable at school, and lacking (e)quality.

People who could fully develop their multilingualism can greatly contribute to the society at large. On top, they have a higher possibility to find their ways in Europe, develop a broader view on different societies and have better chances of being employed.

Offering minority issues and minority languages a space in public education enriches the educational experience of all. It gives an opportunity for students with minority backgrounds to expand their knowledge on their own minority, its history, culture and language, but also provides mainstream students with a chance to familiarize themselves with getting to know minority issues. Knowledge about those issues will lead to an understanding and open-mindedness of society, contributing to a more inclusive, knowledgeable and peaceful society.



## DID YOU KNOW...?

...that the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture launched an online educational platform called Bavarlipe Roma Online University?

...that every pupil starting school in the Western Isles in 2020 will automatically be taught in Gaelic?

...that Alfred Landecker Foundation decided to fund the programme at one of Oxford Uni schools that will focus on the protection of Europe's minorities?

...that the University of Oldenburg advanced their courses „Plattdeutsch/Lower Saxon“ to a study programme with a seat for two professors?

...that buses in Bautzen were covered by an advertising campaign to promote the use of Sorbian language and to also attract more teachers of Sorbian to the profession?

## MINORITY IDENTITY AND PUBLIC LIFE

In public life, minority youth also face a lack of representation and recognition and limitations to express their minority identity and/or language. Minority youth have to face a social and political environment that is not open to them, which many times restrains the expression and development of the minority identity to the home only, hidden from the public. Minority youth are faced with monolingual education, public activities and government that are In public life, minority youth also face a lack of representation and recognition and limitations to express their minority identity and/or language. Minority youth have to face a social and political environment that is not open to them, which many times restrains the expression and development of the minority identity to the home only, hidden from the public. Minority youth are faced with monolingual education, public activities and government that are providing public services only in one or more majority languages. This means that the expression of the minority identity is restricted in public platforms, with the argument that this will exclude other communities.

There are situations where speaking the minority language is forbidden in the national Parliament, even though the language is recognised (e.g. in the Netherlands). Another example can be found in the refusal to have an Irish family use their language on a tombstone in a



cemetery of the English Church. When governmental bodies support, directly or indirectly, discrimination, social, political and/or economic exclusion and segregation of minorities, it has a major impact on the minority and its youth. For one, it is a violation of human rights. Second, it reinforces a subordinate position of a minority community in society on different levels. In addition to being treated as second-class citizens by the state it also has an effect on an everyday level, as people may start to openly discriminate without fear for punishment. Third, it causes a lack of trust in authority and increases a distance from society as a whole.

Also, on a smaller scale, the lack of awareness, recognition and representation can have major implications. The effect of a refusal at governmental level of different script, alphabet or names in minority languages in official documents result in personal names being adapted or translated to the majority language. For example, the French authorities have not

recognized the “ñ” used in Breton, as the letter is not part of the French alphabet, however, Spanish names with the same symbol are accepted. Another example is found in Germany, where the Sorbian female form of surnames is at the moment of writing this report, not yet recognized. This not only means that the concerned person or minority community as a whole is faced with a direct barrier to express their name and identity, it also means that others will not see and recognise diversity through names.

One way to increase visibility in public life is to include the minority languages on signs and signage throughout a country or region. Many minority regions do include signs and signage in minority languages, such as signs in Sorbian in the Upper and Lower Lusatia regions in Germany, German-Croatian signs in Burgenland in Austria, or Slovenian-Italian signs in Italy. However, even these signs are often under scrutiny. For example, the bilingual Slovenian-Italian signs are found in the villages, but not in Trst/Trieste, the cultural capital of the Slovenian minority in Italy. There are also cases of youth activism fighting against monolingual signage, such as Sorbian youth launching an overnight sticker campaign that aimed to raise awareness on the often missing or wrongly written Sorbian equivalents of streets and town name signs; Romansh youth putting stickers on monolingual store names and village signs in Romansh areas; and a case of a poster campaign of Frisian youth that promoted the Frisian signage of a newly

merged municipality instead of the imposed Dutch name. Lack of bilingual and multilingual signs in public spaces greatly suppresses visibility of the minority among the majority. The case of Kashubians in Poland is similar, where there is no bilingual signage in the city of Gdańsk, the administrative centre for the whole region of Kashubia. Sadly, signs and signage in the minority languages are still absent for many minorities, such as the Lower Saxon minorities in the Netherlands, the Danish minority in Germany, or the Alsatian minority in France. There, the lack of visible recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity reinforces ignorance and decreases the willingness to welcome speakers of the minority language. Additionally, it can also have an impact on the motivation of minority language speakers to express themselves in their mother tongue.

Another example is the lack of understanding or awareness that different minorities celebrate and/or gather on different occasions. There can be different ways of celebrating the same event (e.g. Orthodox Easter or Western Christianity Easter), but also holding different traditional celebrations, commemorative events and gatherings (e.g. Vlach’s National Day, Kashubian flag day, Sorbian annual cycle of traditional celebrations or Roma Genocide Remembrance Day). Unfortunately, such differences and the importance of

such distinctive events are little known to others, and therefore, minority youth members face a lack of understanding and cooperativeness to celebrate, commemorate or attend these events.

Such described practices in areas of education and public life push the minority identity to the home environment, and because of it, there is a large emphasis on the natural transfer of the minority identity by parents. One YENie commented that in this case, “families, where tradition, language and customs are cherished, become the main stronghold for the maintenance of minority identity.”

This lack of awareness, recognition and representation often reinforces negative perceptions and reactions on occasion where minority identity is expressed publicly, to the extent of exclusion and discrimination. Speaking a minority language is met with fear and negative feelings, something that is experienced by many – if not all – members of the YEN network already in childhood, and could be illustrated by these lived stories of YENies: “I was about 4 years old, sitting in the car with my father. He was speaking German to me and I answered in Frisian. The friend of mine in the car started crying because she could not understand anything,” or „In primary school I was talking to my parents in Croatian, other pupils asked ‚Why do you talk funny?’”

A very prominent example of exclusion and discrimination is that towards the Roma, which leads to inequality and segregation on all levels. The negative reactions, exclusion and discrimination in public life is especially harmful to a young person’s identity development, as fear and lack of opportunity hamper the will and possibilities to affiliate and express the minority identity freely.

Being part of a minority with a strong ethnic and cultural identity can highly influence the life of young people. They feel proud of their minority identity but if a society does not encourage to share this identity in public, they might opt to simply not take part in public life. If, however, they live in a society in which minorities feel free and are encouraged to express their identity in public they can actively and meaningfully participate in all aspects of life with self-confidence and enrich this society.

When accepting and promoting the access of minorities to public life, the society not only benefits from it but thrives because of it. Diversity that is visible in public life challenges stereotypes and prejudicial behaviours by building social awareness and emotional intelligence. It promotes personal development through enabling low-key intercultural dialogue. It further helps to strengthen communities and build healthy societies and thriving democracies.



### DID YOU KNOW...?

...that in 2020, the Burgenland Croats celebrated 20 years of bilingual German-Croatian signs in Burgenland, and with them, the visibility of their community in a public sphere?

...that a lot of Welsh rugby players from the national team speak Welsh which helps giving the language prestige and motivates people to learn and actively use the language?

...that in Latgale, one of the historical and cultural regions of Latvia, you can also select the Latgalian language when withdrawing money from an ATM machine?

...that the Saxon Ministry of Culture supported the Sorbian language and the use of the language with a campaign named „Sorbian? Of course.“?

...that Wales celebrates an annual “Dydd Miwsig Cymru”(Welsh Language Music Day), where performances are held throughout the country?



## MINORITY IDENTITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Many minorities are located in areas that are rural, infrastructurally less connected and less integrated into today's economic system. In the way our European economy is shaped, young people from these areas are often forced to migrate to urban areas to cater for their fundamental needs. Thus, especially youth are drawn to leave the communities and seek education and work in bigger settlements, accepting the fact that there are no minority structures established in the respective places. As a YENie put it: "Mobility within the minority regions is difficult for youth, as there are few public transportation opportunities which leaves parents with either transporting their kids or not. This leads them to leave when they can."

Keeping up the minority identity becomes increasingly hard in this setting, not only because of the lack of institutional recognition and support, but also because many youths in this situation face constant questioning of their peers and in some cases even disadvantages on the job, in education and the housing market when revealing the minority-aspect of their identity. For this, it is important to have an opportunity for people with similar backgrounds to meet and exchange. As an example, the Romansh diaspora community in Switzerland's cities – all located outside the traditional Romansh settlements – organises small gatherings for young Romansh people living in cities



to offer a space where they do not have to explain themselves as minority members. The feeling of belonging ensures the continuity of the community, and in this latter case also of the language.

Another dimension is that too often by wrong assumptions the lack of opportunities is also linked to the minority. Negative stereotypes on capacity or intelligence linked to the minority too often result in minority youth developing negative connotations towards the minority identity. This may have as a consequence that they do not want to be associated with the minority for the belief that they will have better possibilities when not visibly and proudly identifying with it.

But other aspects need to be addressed as well. While the phenomena of young people leaving their rural home-regions applies not only to minority communities, there are additional very severe impacts on the communities themselves. In many cases the political weight of a minority community is directly linked to its number of members on-site. Therefore, losing the young members can have severe consequences on the

political representation of the community and weight as well as continuity in the future. It also makes the communities more vulnerable with less internal resources for recovery and development.

Mobility is an undeniable fact for society and its youth. Especially rural regions – often inhabited by minority communities – are mostly faced with young people leaving for education or work, many of them not returning to their communities. For these regions, the brain-drain can have grave consequences, which need to be met with an attractive infrastructure allowing people not to leave or to move back to the area. This would improve the living situation for

all in the rural areas and would give (minority) youth the opportunity to freely choose where they want to live, instead of being pressured due to missing socio-economic infrastructure. It is however also possible to see the mobility of young people from minorities as a positive tendency. If minority youth could live their identity wherever they choose to settle, then the minority will not lose members of its community, but gain new cultural ambassadors that will be able to facilitate contacts and transfer knowledge to mainstream peers learning about cultural diversity.



### DID YOU KNOW...?

...that more than 50 twinning communities exist between the two Celtic countries Bretagne and Wales, allowing cultural and economic exchanges?

...that for over 10 years, a Romansh chef, operating in the world's smallest town named Farschno/Fürstenau, has been among the top 50 chefs in the world?

...that the Basque Country established in 2005 an initiative called "Bizkaia Talent" that encourages the conditions necessary to recruit, engage and retain young Basques in the area of Bilbao-Bizkaia?

...that a medicinal chemistry student from Cardiff created new scientific terms in Welsh to be able to carry out his research and explain his studies?

...that the Austrian National Youth Council established within its structures a Working Group focused specifically on minorities and the challenges they face in Austria?



## MINORITY IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

In traditional media such as newspapers, television and radio, clichés and stereotypes about minorities are frequently reproduced, as well as dis- and misinformation and a negative presentation of minorities spread. This can lead to a situation

where the public is not taking minorities seriously when they are talking about their own reality - as it contradicts the dis- and misinformation from traditional media. But not only is the external perception of the minorities at stake. The media coverage of the minority itself plays an important part too with the representation of minorities. Therefore, it is important to look at independent media from minority communities themselves. Some minorities enjoy their independent media (newspaper, television, radio), but many minorities have partially dependent media or none at all. For example, neither the Roma in Bulgaria nor the Aromanians in Serbia have self-representative media channels. For most minorities, self-representation in the media has (severe) limitations, such as restrictions on own input, on the amount of broadcasting time, or the unpopular airing time of these programmes. When minority youth members can only consume mass media or national news, they are more likely to develop a negative self-image due to the lack of role-models and positive representation, and eventually, they may feel reservations or a lack of identification with minority issues and the community.



In addition to traditional media, social media have become a breeding ground for hate speech that is primarily targeting members of marginalised communities and is facilitated by anonymity that feeds into anti-minority threads and portrayal of stereotypical images. These affect minority youth identity and/or views of their shared experiences. For example, a YENie put forward that during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially the Roma community has continuously been marked as a scapegoat on social media, and the community was blamed for spreading the virus. Social media therefore can act as a catalyst for the spread of negative information and representation. Especially improper information on traditional mass media may cause the triggering of hate speech on social media.

A better representation of minorities, minority issues and minority languages in the traditional media would help disrupt

stereotypes and hate against marginalized groups. As a YENie put it: "Media can help minorities to survive." Additionally, amplifying voices of the less heard and increasing their visibility in general contributes to mutual understanding and creates a peaceful atmosphere where everybody feels valued. Recognizing minority rights and access to the media, including the use of minority languages, contributes to a diversification of the media landscape, ensuring that there is information not only about the minorities but also information and ownership of the

narrative coming from within the minority community itself. It also contributes to the respect of the right of freedom of expression of minorities.



### DID YOU KNOW...?

...that there is a podcast called "MYnority MYSay" designed and led by young members of different national and ethnic minorities in Europe?

...that in September 2019 the first Roma TV channel in the world started to broadcast giving the possibility to the community to control its own narrative and bring their culture to a wider audience?

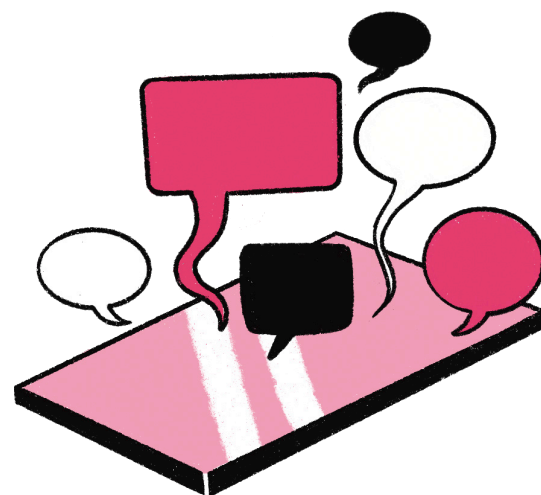
...that Peppa Pig is now also being broadcasted in Võro, a regional language spoken in Southern Estonia and children can enjoy it in their own language, which is important for their multilingual development?

...that since 1999 the Sorbian youth broadcast „Satkula“ has been moderated and edited by young Upper Sorbian journalists?

...that in February 2019, Ella Marie Hætta Isaksen was the first Sami woman to feature on the cover of „Kvinner og Klær/KK“, the biggest Norwegian women's magazine?

## MINORITY IDENTITY AND DIGITAL OPPORTUNITIES

Minority youth may feel that they cannot use or express their minority identity in the digital world, and there is a lack of tools and materials to actively use the minority languages. This is not only because of a lack of visibility and awareness of minority identities, but also because there is an absence of opportunities to use the lesser-spoken languages in technological tools, digital and online platforms or social media. For example, many minority languages are not included in the interface of the most common social media platforms, or youth are faced with the problem that they cannot write in their language easily, because the keyboard does not support the script or diacritics. Another problem is that the autocorrect may not recognise the minority language and incorrectly change the words to the majority language. As most minority youth are multilingual, they therefore have a need for multilingual devices that can swiftly change to the desired language. Because of the lack of this technological and linguistic support, youth feel forced to use the majority language. A YENie expressed this need to include the minority language in digital devices: "Nowadays, I have to switch to German or to English when I want to speak with Siri, or when I want to do something with digital devices. I want to have my language there." This importance of digital opportunities is also highlighted when youth move away from the minority region and still want



to be connected. A YENie explained: "It's important now I'm not living in the region, and you do not have a connection to your culture except for the language, Sorbian. It's very important for me nowadays, the Sorbian language is my new Sorbian identity." What is more, where minority languages are integrated into the educational system there often is a need to use the language outside the formal setting. Digital opportunities could provide an easy solution for this.

Furthermore, visibility of minorities in digital life is low, both in the presence of languages and communities. First, when a language is not included in lists, such as language options for digital devices, tools for translation, voice command systems, speech-to-text programmes etc., people may never know that these languages exist. A YENie confirmed this by saying: "For all minorities, digitalization is very important, because you can spread the coolness of minority languages, because if you implement them to the operating systems,

everybody sees that the language is there. Everybody in the world can see and read the name of the language, and if someone is interested, they can learn more about the language. It's the presence of our languages in the digital systems." Second, there are few options to express the diverse minority communities by means of visuals such as emojis (e.g. flags or symbols).

Up to this day the inclusion of minorities and minority languages into the digital space to increase their visibility rely on the efforts of the communities themselves. For example, a program may be open source and easy to adapt to a minority language, but someone still needs to have knowledge of both the minority language and the technology, as well as the possibility and time to invest. There are however some major platforms that support speakers of minority languages to import and collect data to be used for Language Technology. A few examples of such community initiatives are the initiative of the Sorbian community to have their language in Mozilla Common Voice, the successful campaign in Fryslân to have Frisian added to Google Translate, or the Romansh youth, who held a 72-hour marathon recording speech fragments to be used for Language Technology.

Such initiatives from the communities need the support of the large tech companies nonetheless, as a YENie explained: "The problem is, you can put the database together, and you can give it to, for example, Apple or Google, and they will build the system. But the problem is that they have the system. You cannot really implement

it on your systems yourself." This means that after handing over the data, the minority communities have no influence over it and are strictly dependent on the company. From the visual side, a minority community can suggest an emoji to be added. However, the application form proves to be difficult, especially for minority communities, as it requires data on how often the emoji will be used. After handing in this form, it may take a long time. For example, the application for a Frisian flag emoji was handed in in 2018, and there has been no response to this in 2020, and the application for the Breton flag emoji has a similar lack of response. Moreover, there have been several initiatives by Roma communities and beyond, and yet no Romani flag has been included as emoji. This exclusion may be part of the barriers that big technology companies form, as they may demand extensive information that is not available, or they require a certain number of users or supporters, which is too high in the context of minority communities. Moreover, some technology companies may feel that such minority inclusion and visibility is a political statement, which they may steer away from for economic reasons. Thus, minority communities need – next to the much-needed state support – support from outside their communities, as well as from the large technology companies, to raise visibility and foster inclusion.

## IN CONCLUSION

If all cultural identity was respected and recognized, it would be much easier for young people from minorities to become empowered and motivated to actively and meaningfully participate in society according to their skills and expectation. Members from those communities could openly share their different perspectives of the world and different practices and values, which could create new ways of helping society to become more peaceful and sustainable.

As seen throughout this chapter, multiple and intersectional discrimination that manifests itself in different structural barriers and challenges plays a strong role in the lives of minority youth as it is grounded in more than one motive and can be directed from different sources at the same time. It needs to be underlined that minority youth, by challenging the culture and traditions of their own community, risk not only exclusion from the majority society but also from the group they are belonging to. Forcing them to make a choice resulting in loss of one identity, can not only harm the overall identities, but also lead to devastating effects on one's values and attitudes as well as on their capacity to meaningfully participate at all levels of society.

Knowing where they fit in the world is crucial for youth identifying as a minority. It contributes to their self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-worth. The sense of belonging and feeling of being included in their communities and society at large builds their cultural resistance and resilience towards multiple discrimination and prejudice to which they are exposed on day-to-day basis. Only when diverse strengths, abilities and experiences of minority youth are recognized, understood and valued they are able to build a stronger sense of identity and wellbeing needed for achieving their full potential. Thus, becoming active citizens of the world that meaningfully contribute to the development of democratic societies with their knowledge, experiences and skills.

We already live in multicultural societies, where workplaces and schools increasingly consist of various cultural, racial, ethnic and linguistic groups. Learning about people we interact with on a daily basis, not only helps us understand different perspectives and experiences, but also facilitates a better understanding of our own values. This challenges our own personal biases and prejudices by encouraging us to assess and self-reflect on our own identities through new knowledge and ways of thinking.

The inclusion of minority languages in digital devices is crucial for minority youth: "You spend so much time on your devices and if you cannot use your mother tongue there, you lose it." Minority youth see themselves using majority languages instead, with detrimental effects. "We would lose our minority languages very fast, because people will adapt to the languages used by the systems." What is more, digital inclusion broadens opportunities, on many levels. They enable people to interact, reach out and work wherever they are, from urban or rural areas, as well as across borders. Such broad digital inclusion would be to the benefit of many more than the minority community only.

In short, the minority identity of youth should be present, reflected, and supported in their digital life, which forms a major part in their lives. However, youth see that their minority identity is not reflected in their digital lives, due to a lack of support, tools and materials. To include the minority identity and make it visible in the digital life, support from the community, both majority and minority, as well as support from the big tech companies is needed. The more minorities are included in digital life, the more everyone can benefit.



### DID YOU KNOW...?

...that from now on you can also type in Kashubian on the Google Gboard?

...that many open-source software and systems such as Ubuntu are translated into Breton's language thanks to an army of young Breton-speaking volunteers?

...that Welsh, Frisian, and Breton are included as options for the interface for Facebook?

...that the Sorbian community has an initiative to have their language in Mozilla Common Voice?

...that the EU wants to achieve full digital language equality by 2030?



## RECOMMENDATIONS

No matter how empowered a person feels and no matter the strength of the minority identity, stereotypes and exclusion have a great impact on the lives of young minority members. The constant need to defend one's own minority identity and the lack of space to freely be oneself is exhausting. Therefore, as YEN we want to share some recommendations on how to support identity development, diversity and inclusion.



**In the light of the above, we invite everyone, to their own capacities, to:**

- ★ Provide opportunities for minority youth to strengthen their minority identity and feel empowered to openly identify as a minority.
- ★ Empower minority youth by enabling them to participate actively in decision-making structures and processes at all levels.
- ★ Organise events that bring together minority and mainstream youth to promote intercultural dialogue and breaking down of stereotypes.
- ★ Raise public awareness about the importance of pluralism, social inclusion and diversity.



- ★ Take necessary measures to prevent the use of hate speech and combat disinformation and misinformation, stigmatisation and negative stereotyping.

- ★ Connect and communicate with minority youth organisations, take them seriously and support them.

### In regard to minority identity and the official recognition of minorities:

- ★ Legally recognize minorities and minority languages, as it secures the human rights of minority members in education, justice, administration and public life, media, culture, and socio-economic activities.
- ★ By means of recognition, increase visibility and awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and minorities.
- ★ Inform yourself about the status of minorities in your country and about possible ongoing fights for legal recognition.
- ★ Support minority organisations in their efforts for legal recognition by supporting petitions, campaigns, calls to actions, collection of signatures that address a lack of legal recognition.

### In regard to minority identity and formal education:

- ★ Adhere to the fundamental principles of diversity, pluralism, equality and non-discrimination when applying the right to education for persons belonging to minorities.



- ★ Create conditions that support multilingual education and education in minority languages and ensure a better understanding amongst all youth in the diverse and multilingual societies.
- ★ Acknowledge and recognize the skills and potential of minority youth.
- ★ Ensure sources of funding on regional, national and European level for the development and implementation of policies and programmes related to minority education.
- ★ Strengthen minority youth's identity by introducing minority topics into school curricula and by developing these topics with the active participation of communities in question.

### In regard to minority identity and public life:



- ★ Support diversity and multilingualism at all levels and areas of public life.
- ★ Support expressions of minority identity in public life.
- ★ Promote and support self-representation as a means of linguistic and cultural diversity and empowerment of minority members.
- ★ Inform yourself and raise awareness about diversity and the existence of minorities, as a lack of knowledge increases negative reactions.
- ★ Condemn and counter all types of discrimination, exclusion, segregation, hate speech, and negative stereotyping as violations of human rights that do not have any place in an equal and democratic society.
- ★ Find synergies between trainings, policies and empowerment activities

through cooperating with different minority youth organisations.

- ★ Create and use new tools and ways to promote ideas of peaceful coexistence.

### In regard to minority identity and socio-economic opportunities:

- ★ Enhance educational and socioeconomic opportunities for minority youth in their own region.



- ★ Improve infrastructure such as digital connections and public transport in rural areas.
- ★ Support minority members living outside the traditional areas to ensure their feeling of belonging and preventing the loss of identity.
- ★ Adapt existing structures (such as political representation based on numbers of the local community) to the needs of minorities.

- ★ Ensure that minority identity and its expression pose no restrictions to socioeconomic mobility.

- ★ Perceive diversity as valuable, not detrimental, to socioeconomic activities and facilities.

### In regard to minority identity and representation in the media:



- ★ Avoid sensationalism and hate speech and acknowledge the complexity of the context of stories and narratives.
- ★ Provide a broad range of views, including those from minority communities.
- ★ Promote media and technologies that take into consideration the cultural and linguistic diversity and cater the needs and interests of minorities.

- ★ Create an environment in which members of all groups in society can participate and minorities feel encouraged to contribute.

- ★ Counter hate speech, dis- and misinformation and propaganda towards minorities in traditional and digital media.

- ★ Create opportunities for self-representation of minorities that allows minority members to take ownership of their narrative.

- ★ Actively involve citizens, governments and the private sector in the actions taken against hate speech.

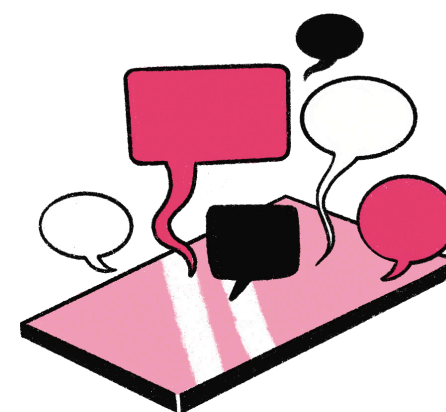
- ★ Encourage a human rights-based approach to journalism.

### In regard to minority identity and digital opportunities:

- ★ Support minority communities in their efforts to be represented and included in technology.

- ★ Support minority communities in digitalisation, by means of data-collection, technological support and digital inclusion.

- ★ Expand and support the technical tools and opportunities that enable the usage of minority languages, in text, audio, speech and writing.



- ★ Reflect and expand diversity in the digital life in fields such as language support and visual aspects such as emojis.

- ★ Support petitions from minority communities to include representation in the digital sphere.

## FURTHER READINGS

- ★ *Compass*. By Council of Europe, 2015. [www.coe.int/en/web/compass](http://www.coe.int/en/web/compass). A series on human rights, ordered per theme and aimed at youth.
- ★ *Minority language media and the COVID-19 pandemic*. By the European Centre for Minority Issues, 2020. [www.ecmi.de](http://www.ecmi.de). A series on minorities and media during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ★ *Regional Dossiers*. By Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning. [www.mercator-research.eu/en/knowledge-base](http://www.mercator-research.eu/en/knowledge-base). A series on autochthonous lesser-used languages in the educational systems.
- ★ *Wiki on minority language learning*. By Mercator European Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning. [wiki.mercator-research.eu/start](http://wiki.mercator-research.eu/start). A website on autochthonous lesser-used languages which have low/no security in the educational systems.
- ★ *The Digital Language Diversity Project*. By the Digital Language Project. [www.dldp.eu](http://www.dldp.eu). A project to provide tools for minority language communities and increase digital language diversity.
- ★ *New technologies, new social media and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. By Jones/ Lainio/ Moring/ Resit, 2020. [rm.coe.int/new-media-report-web-en/168098dd88](http://rm.coe.int/new-media-report-web-en/168098dd88)



"RATHER THAN AN ACT OF PRIVILEGE,  
MINORITY RIGHTS SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD  
AS SPECIFIC MEASURES FOR THE  
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SAME STANDARDS OF HUMAN DIGNITY AS  
THE REST OF THE SOCIETY."

**MINORITY  
RIGHTS  
ARE HUMAN  
RIGHTS**



**Minority rights** are individual and universal rights that aim to protect vulnerable people in society, namely members of racial, ethnic, national, linguistic, religious, class or sexual minority groups. In our work as YEN, we aim to empower young people from autochthonous, national, ethnic and linguistic minorities in their demands for equality by providing space and opportunities to discuss and learn about human and minority rights.

Whereas the previous chapter focused mostly on how many factors affect the minority identity of young people, here we will specifically highlight the importance of official recognition of national, ethnic and linguistic minorities in connection with the promotion, protection and implementation of minority rights. At all levels, we observe a lack of official recognition of minorities, a lack of acknowledgement of minority languages and the importance to use these, and legal mechanisms and instruments that are inadequate or not revised regularly. Moreover, there is a need for better data on minority members to adequately represent the diversity of society in statistics, and policies based on these. We will be diving deeper into the importance of recognition by national and international actors and its connections to the struggles and challenges minority youth are facing in accessing their rights as young people and as minorities in all areas of life.

It is vital that minorities are legally recognized. This is the basis for legal protection of equal access to participation, treatment, and opportunities in society. Without, minority members face barriers to access basic **human rights** such as citizenship, health care, education, fair trial, employment, politics and government, media, and face a lack of freedom of speech, privacy, movement, or freedom of religion. Minority rights thus affect life and well-being as a whole and in every single aspect. Yet, today human rights are not enjoyed by all. Especially minority groups without legal recognition face barriers in accessing their rights. While minority rights are a part of the human rights framework, the system as a whole is not sufficiently responsive to the needs of minority members. For minorities to be successfully protected, minority rights should be specifically safeguarded. **Stateless people**, of whom 75% are members of a minority according to the UNHCR 2016 Global Trends Report, are an extreme example, as they are barred from accessing basic human rights in every aspect. Within Europe, especially members of the Roma community are at the risk of statelessness or are stateless. Moreover, with the COVID-19 pandemic, we observed a major breach in human rights affecting minority members facing barriers to access health care, information, education, and employment, just to name a few as structural discrimination manifested more clearly during the pandemic. Human rights should be commonplace, yet we observe they are not upheld for all, nor that they are guaranteed at every time, place, or situation. To ensure and advance equal

rights for everyone, we urgently need to resolve the vulnerability of the most marginalised groups and to strengthen the capacity of minority communities to claim their rights.

Legal recognition and protection of minorities and minority members can take place at different levels and within different forms, such as **treaties**, laws, agreements, or policies. Each level and form of recognition has a different kind of impact and execution. At the international level, minority rights are covered by, for example, the United Nations (UN) or the Council of Europe (CoE). Major international documents relevant for minorities are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN), the **European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages** (CoE), and the **Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities** (CoE). It should be noted here that the nation states which sign and ratify the international treaties, decide which minorities are recognised in their state, and which are left out from these international protections. On the level of the European Union (EU), there is no legal framework regarding autochthonous, national, ethnic or linguistic minorities implemented, regardless of the efforts made by the European citizen's movement Minority SafePack Initiative (MSPI) during the last decade. At national or (regional and/or local) governmental levels, nation states or governmental bodies can underline legal recognition with (constitutional) laws, agreements, or policies. All these different forms and levels of legal protection and recognition result in the fact that members

of different minorities in different European states or regions may enjoy varying levels of recognition; from no recognition at all to full recognition by the state.

When exploring the concept of "minority youth rights" we need to be aware of the unique challenges that minority youth are facing in accessing resources and opportunities. Only by identifying and addressing both dimensions - youth rights and minority rights - policy measures and targeted actions are able to effectively grasp and reflect the realities of minority youth. At YEN we acknowledge the work of the Council of Europe as a pioneer of European youth policy and minority rights issues. Nevertheless, we have to keep in mind that most of the treaties created to protect minority rights and to promote minority languages, have been designed in the late 1980's Europe that was radically different from the Europe we know now.



# MINORITY YOUTH RIGHTS AND EQUALITY

Protection of identity is one of the core pillars of minority rights as the enjoyment and transmission of one's culture remain vital for the survival of a community. As explored in the previous chapter the existence of minority communities largely depends on the minority youth to carry the identity, culture, and heritage. It is not enough for societies to say they value diversity and the minority identity, but it is also their responsibility to create the conditions that enable young people to express, practice and carry it on. A number of structural and systemic barriers remains that prevent minority youth to claim their stake and make their voices heard. Meaningful minority **youth participation** starts with the recognition of minorities and addressing discrimination. However, the rights and needs of marginalised youth remain neglected in the decisions of political institutions, and are neither prioritised nor effectively upheld in current legal frameworks of many European countries. Governments yet have to grasp and address the lack of official recognition of minorities through the lens of structural intersectional discriminations without neglecting the youth dimension. Especially in cases of **non-kin-state minorities** that are not able to rely on the benefits and assistance of their kin-states and remain at the mercy of the laws of the home-state, the damaging effects of the lack of recognition

are even more visible. For national, ethnic and linguistic minorities official recognition is not a sign of enjoyment of privileges reserved specifically for minorities, but an important step towards equality and access to rights that belong to all human beings - rights that are currently not recognised for people belonging to minorities under the framework of human rights.

In the following paragraphs, we will be aiming to provide a sufficient framework needed for understanding the importance of official recognition of minorities. Specifically, we will be looking at its impact on the effective participation of minorities in public life, and on minority youth's access to rights in areas such as political participation and representation, language use, educational system and the media.

## THE RIGHT TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION



Legal recognition of minorities and minority members can be a means for better and/or equal political participation, opportunities, and (self-)representation. However, it is not enough on its own. We observe that even with proper recognition, many barriers still exist, and especially minority youth find themselves excluded. These barriers exist because of a lack of acknowledgement that specific support for minority members is needed to ensure they have equal access to political participation, opportunities, and (self-)representation.

- ★ There is a **lack of political participation**. Though voting is a human right and lies at the base of a democratic system, some minority members face barriers to do so. Stateless minority members for example cannot cast a vote without any citizenship. Another barrier to vote can be special minority acts, which claim to support minority voters to cast a vote on a minority representative. However, these representatives are on a separate ballot list, which puts minority members for the choice to vote either for the representatives on the separate minority list who have little to no chance of election, or to vote for a representative on the main list with a chance of election.
- ★ There are **barriers to political representation and self-representation** when there are no mechanisms that support the specific needs of minority members. Institutions, councils and public bodies lack diversity and therefore fail to mirror the diverse situation of every society in Europe. Structures that enhance representation and self-representation may include policies for diversity and inclusion, reserved seats for members of the minority, or lower electoral thresholds for minority representatives.
- ★ One of key challenges in regard to the participation of minority youth is also **representation in different organisations**. For example, we have national youth councils and mainstream youth organisations that do not involve minorities. On the other hand, we can observe that minority councils, forums, and organisations are very much dominated by older men. As a result, minority youth are completely left out and pushed to the margins without the possibility to voice their opinions.

★ There are **few political parties representing minorities**. This can be due to the barriers before and after formation. To form a party, there can be barriers set by laws and regulations, which set a minimum number of supportive signatures or fees to participate. The number of necessary signatures can be too high to be accomplished by minority members only, and thus the system rules out parties that represent smaller groups in society. There are also examples of systems that do support minorities in this aspect. In Denmark, a lower number of signatures is needed for a party to represent the German minority. After formation, parties representing minorities need support as well, for example, in the form of a lower number of necessary signatures to be listed on the ballot for specific regions, or cities, where minorities often form a lower percentage in total.

★ When there are **no arrangements for minority representation in parliament**, it is made difficult – if not impossible – for minority members to represent the minority at this level. A good practice is found in South Tyrol, Italy, where the German and Ladin minorities have reserved seats in the Landtag to ensure the minority voice.

★ Due to unapproachable and **non-transparent decision-making processes**, there is a lack of trust in governmental institutions, especially from the side of minority youth. This results in creation of a political exclusion and disconnect between politicians and youth. To have a fair representation, it is important to have mechanisms in place that support and actively include minority youth. A threat to such a supportive mechanism for youth participation can be shown with the example of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe that found itself in danger of complete dismantlement in 2019 as a result of budget cuts. Thanks to the mobilisation of young people and their allies, the cuts did not go through, and the Youth Department's work and the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) can remain an example of co-management practice as a platform that not only empowers youth but provides space and opportunities for them to participate in the structures and decision-making processes on the international level. What this shows is however the need for such structures to be recognised, valued and protected as what they are: vital systems that ensure equal rights for youth.

★ **More opportunities are needed for minority youth in sustainable structures for active dialogue**. Minority youth find themselves excluded, because of their age, their minority background, or the combination of these. Structures should be in place to support the inclusion of youth so there is fair representation.

★ **Voter education programmes fail to include minority issues and cultural diversity**. If there are no structures that promote diversity within the education programmes, minority youth are excluded from representation and from learning about issues related to them. What is more, it upholds the structures that favour the majority.

## THE RIGHT TO ONE'S OWN LANGUAGE

Language remains one of the main components of an individual's personality and plays – as shown in the previous chapter – a vital role in minority communities that are seeking to maintain distinct cultural identity. Minority languages can be recognised officially in different ways and on different levels. Even if a minority

language is fully recognised by a state on paper, the resulting rights and steps that protect and support it are often only insufficiently implemented. As YEN, we observe numerous threats to the existence of minority languages, and the following systemic and structural barriers for minority speakers:

★ **Minority languages and languages of marginalised groups are often considered invaluable** and unnecessary tools of communication, especially if they are not equally recognised as an official language in a state. Hence, many minorities have difficulties with preserving their identity, language and culture.

★ Freedom of expression is being compromised when individuals are **not able or allowed to use their own language** with other members of the community.

★ Even if minority languages are recognised on **paper the use of minority languages is often not facilitated in administrative authorities** and public services, most often mirrored in examples of individuals not receiving a reply in minority languages after submitting a request in these languages. Time after time, we observe a lack of minority language speakers or interpreters in authorities and public services or simply a lack of awareness about the right to communicate in recognised minority languages.

★ Linguistic and cultural assets are often not recognised as valuable resources and therefore not mandated in **bilingual and multilingual signage**. Not only are multilingual signs vital for the visibility of the minority groups that are part of a multicultural society, but are also a resource for language learning and ensure a constant exposure of the youngest members of minority communities to the minority languages. The introduction

of multilingual signage mostly requires local policies which are in some cases openly opposed by interest groups denying minorities their rights.

★ The standardisation of minority languages is often challenged by a **lack or decreased number of institutions promoting and protecting a minority language**. This problem is often increased when such institutions are not specifically protected and supported by a society that does not see them as vital in enabling equal rights of minorities.

★ **Lack of standardised version of a language** is also closely related to the amount of literary works written in the minority languages. Exposure of children and young people to a language through reading is key to literacy and proficiency in a minority language.

★ The continuous **stigmatisation of minority languages** mainly results in a language shift among young speakers in favour of the dominant language.

★ Educational systems that should be serving as one of the main components of the empowerment of young people, are often lacking quality representation of minority languages. Additionally, there are **not many opportunities outside of the formal educational system** to learn a minority language.

★ Structurally, on the level of minority language education, there is to be mentioned the **lack of monolingual (minority language) or bi- or multilingual (minority and majority language) schools**, from kindergartens up to universities. Especially non-kin-state minority languages are not taught this way, for example, Ladin in Italy, Bildts in the Netherlands, or Aromanian/Vlach in Serbia or Romania. Additionally, there are only a few opportunities to learn a minority language inside the mainstream formal education system. This too is the case for non-kin-state minority languages in particular. Often, there is too little support from the government for either of these solutions.

★ For the existence of the minority **languages intergenerational transmissions of a language** are far from trivial. However, for many cases post-war generations of parents when most minority languages were persecuted, shame and embarrassment of speaking the tongue are major parts of a lack of parental efforts for transmitting the language. As is the case of Kashubian and Breton, almost an entire generation failed to naturally transmit the language to their children believing that speaking the dominant language, that is Polish or French, will help children get better established in life. While their grandparents have learnt it at home, their grandchildren are now learning it at school with few possibilities to practice their language skills at home. This is a clear example of how a lack of equal rights, opportunities and protection for one generation can have a

long-lasting effect on minority communities. Even though the situation for a lot of minorities changed in their respective countries, they are still affected by it.

★ The position of the minority languages is threatened also because of the **minoritisation of minority languages by the country's dominant language**. Many minority languages are considered endangered and on the verge of extinction because they are not considered important, leaving the marginalised language to only exist between four walls of one's home. Embodied in every language, and especially in a minority one, is a whole set of culture and tradition that reflects a unique worldview with its own value system. Extinction of a language does not remain at that. It results in an irrevocable loss of specific cultural knowledge. Official recognition and effective implementation of rights can be a powerful tool to prevent minority languages being minoritised by allowing them to be used equally in society.

## THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "everyone has the right to education". This document intends that education is to "be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms". As we already observed in the previous chapter, education in the minority field is on the one hand key to language acquisition (for linguistic minorities), on the other hand a base and guarantee for the promotion and development of minority identity. Another important instrument, which has been ratified by every country in the world, except the United States of America, is the Convention on the Rights of the Child and especially its article 30 which stipulates that "a child belonging to [...] a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or



her own religion, or to use his or her own language". Although the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities recognise education as a key-field and define several obligations for their state parties (in the Charter under part II and under part III article 8, and in the Framework Convention under articles 12, 13 and 14), there is no legally binding supra-national instrument to enforce the implementation thereof. Young people speaking two or more languages have a higher possibility to find their ways in



Europe, develop a broader view on different societies and have better chances of being employed. Nevertheless, we often encounter severe lacks and room for improvement concerning quality education in the minority field.

The demand for education in the minority field does not only include the wish to have classes to learn the

minority language. Minorities can also be characterised by having a different ethnic background, different culture, different traditions or history whether they speak the same language as the majority or not. For minority youth it is vital to see their identity represented in schools and for non-minority youth to learn about the existence of minorities.

### Next to the flawed language education, we can observe content-related as well as structural factors:

- ★ Due to national curricula and/or other educational laws, there is a severe **lack of classes that focus on minorities or regional/minority languages** in primary and secondary schools.
- ★ Minorities are generally missing in history and civic education curricula throughout all the school years in most of Europe or are **diminished to a sentence in the footnote**.
- ★ Furthermore, there are flawed, outdated, or even no materials to learn minority languages, and/or only few, or have to be bought in special stores. Also, **open-source materials to learn minority languages are rare**. The same applies to textbooks of other subjects (e.g. history), which most often do not include minorities sufficiently.
- ★ On the level of higher education, it is increasingly difficult to study minority language philology at universities. In the past years, there have been repeated efforts to tear down departments like these, mostly for economic reasons. Examples for this are Kashubian at the University of Gdańsk or Frisian at the University of Groningen, where the programmes have been downsized, face severe restrictions for students to attend, or are removed as a whole. To secure these departments, it is important for states to recognise their value and place them under specific protection that is not subject to economic reasoning.
- ★ Without opportunities to study minorities and minority languages, there is a **lack of competencies of teachers that can address minority issues**, teach minority languages and support students with different backgrounds. There are generally too few trained teachers that speak a minority language fluently. This for instance is the case for the Gaelic community in Scotland. This will have a snowball effect with negative consequences for minority (language) education. Luckily, some minority language communities are

supported to counter this development. For example, the Sorbian minority started a campaign to promote a second-chance education for Sorbian speakers to become trained teachers and thus guarantee the continuity of the education in their language. Also, in Brittany, it is now possible for unemployed adults to follow a 6 or 9 months free intensive training (35 hours per week) to learn Breton and to become a teacher in mono- or multilingual schools.

- ★ Furthermore, we observe the **lack of exchange (mobility) possibilities** for students as well as teachers to and from minority regions, not only because of geographical limitations, but more seriously because of opportunity gaps and economic inequality of marginalised groups.
- ★ What is more, **non-formal education principles are not included in the formal educational system**, and this would be beneficial beyond the minority education field. These principles are crucial for the development of the individuals, especially of marginalised groups as we will see in the following chapter.

## THE RIGHT TO MEDIA REPRESENTATION

The relationship between media and minority identity, and effects of stigmatising media discourses on the construction of identity of minority youth, have been extensively explored in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, it is crucial to underline that minorities are facing discrimination not only in regard to representation in the media, but also in their access to it. Whereas states seem to be slowly making efforts in regard to permission and subsidisation of minority media, there are nevertheless substantial faults in legal standards, as it is the states themselves defining which minority groups



are recognized as national minorities. This affects the broadcasting rights of minority communities that identify as minorities but are not legally recognised as such.

- ★ The legal standards protecting the rights of minority groups to **freedom of expression** and information are not sufficient. This severely impacts the shape of minority broadcasting media, especially in cases of minorities to which a key marker of identity might not be the language and a minority is not distinguished linguistically from the majority.

- ★ Additionally, without the support of the national state for permissions and subsidisation, **the voices of minority members are suppressed**, and minority members cannot take in or share information in their own languages.
- ★ While mass media play a role in the context of language minorization, minority media on the other hand enhance the social prestige of minority languages and bring visibility to them, thus playing an essential part in promotion and protection of minority languages. A lack of official recognition of minorities and minority languages in respective states results in a **lack of presence of minority communities, their culture and languages in public broadcasting**, that is not only vital for social cohesion of societies but elementary for the empowerment of young members of minority communities.
- ★ There is a **high inequality of human and financial resources** granted to minority or majority media. Mass media do receive most of the attention leaving out initiatives from minorities. It is also mostly the case that mass media, for commercial reasons, rarely broadcast minority artistic creations but rather focus on mainstream music and artists.
- ★ A **lack of broadcasting space for minority communities** greatly reduces the presence of role models through which young people from minorities shape their self-identities. This lack of exposure to role models has a direct impact on the confidence and empowerment of minority youth. Moreover, sparse or no broadcasting time increases the lack of awareness and understanding amongst the majority for minority members. For example, North Frisian has little to no presence in public broadcasting, but has a few hours of daily programming by private broadcasters.
- ★ We observe the **lack of diversity in mass media** that should represent the full range of communities, culture and opinions. Mass media are not paying adequate attention to issues concerning national, ethnic and linguistic minorities, thus limiting the plurality of views in mass broadcasting, and restricting minority topics only to minority-owned channels. Without support of the national state for permissions and subsidisation, the voices of minority members are suppressed, and minority members cannot take in or share information in their own languages.
- ★ Moreover, media companies should be held accountable for **discrimination of minorities**. For instance, some newspapers refuse to print articles and messages that are written in the minority language, even if the minority language is recognised and/or an official language.

- ★ Furthermore, we observe a **lack to address geo-blocking within Europe**. Geo-blocking withholds **kin-state minorities** to access media from the kin-state, and blocks related or dispersed minorities to access and enjoy media across the border.
- ★ There is a **need for more online tools** that support minorities in social and online media. This is needed so that minority members can access all information, have freedom of speech and have equal opportunities.

## IN CONCLUSION

As illustrated through this chapter, the protection and promotion of minority communities depend a great deal on circumstances of recognition and accessibility to rights. Without legal recognition, the identity of the individual as well as the minority collective is at stake as it prevents minorities from enjoying many rights that are considered as universal and inalienable. It is crucial to learn and understand the rights individuals have, as many are working to undermine the standards of basic equality and human dignity.

While social rights, such as access to health care, education, housing, employment and public services, are fundamental rights, the access and the implementation of these rights in the case of minority youth is lagging behind. In order to enable minority youth to fulfil their potential, it is crucial to combine human rights mechanisms with instruments on minority rights and

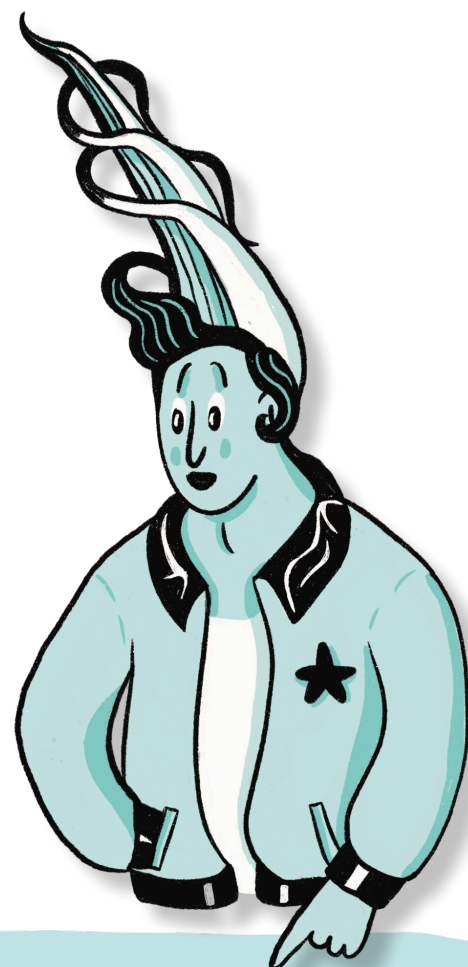
protection of the languages, culture and traditions themselves. There is still much room for improvement and there is an ongoing pursuit by minority youth activists towards proactive support for minority rights, and fighting for equality and meaningful participation.

By **condemning discrimination and upholding human rights for all, including people from disadvantaged backgrounds, minority youth can finally be allowed to be what they are in the first place - young.**

In order for young people who identify as minorities to play an active role in promotion, protection and execution of minority rights, human rights education is essential. It can promote values and attitudes that encourage all individuals to uphold their own rights and those of others and should be put in focus of any work with young people.

The importance of minority rights is closely connected to the framework of human rights. There would be no need for minority rights, if human rights were upheld by all. Rather than an act of privilege, minority rights should be understood as specific measures for the protection of all, so even the most disadvantaged, marginalised and vulnerable can benefit from the same standards of human dignity as the rest of the society.

Minority rights are human rights. In other words, in order to uphold and fulfil human rights (of all), minority rights need to be respected, protected and guaranteed.



## DID YOU KNOW...?



...that a Brazilian man hoping to become a UK citizen has become one of the first to pass a citizenship test using Welsh?

...that Doric will be taught at Aberdeen University in order to empower young speakers and place it on an equal footing with other European languages?

...that in September 2020, after 30 years of advocacy work, the Netherlands recognised Dutch Sign Language as an official language?

...that Sweden initiated a special commission that started a reconciliation process with the Tornedalians and examined past abuses against the minority?

...that a campaign calling for the official recognition and legal protection of Scots language has been launched?



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore, in the light of the above, we invite everyone, in their own capacities, to:

### In regard to recognition and protection:

- ★ Understand that everyone can do something about the protection and promotion of minorities. Inform yourself about the legal situation of minorities in your country, support initiatives of minorities to be recognized or protected.
- ★ Provide more opportunities for minority youth in sustainable structures for active dialogue.
- ★ Combat all forms of discrimination, racism and exclusion by providing opportunities that strengthen young people's understanding of the key concepts of minority and human rights.



- ★ Include minority issues and promote cultural diversity in voter education programmes.
- ★ For European states to ratify and sign the existing legislative instruments of the Charter and recognize autochthonous minorities within their countries.
- ★ Strengthen the legislative instruments of the Charter and the Framework Convention protecting the minorities and make more use of them.
- ★ For the EU and its member states to support and implement the Minority SafePack Initiative and realise the concrete recommendations for minority rights, including the eradication of statelessness.
- ★ Facilitate self-declaration as minority members within national censuses by providing the possibility to check more than one option of identity affiliation.
- ★ For states and international organizations to reinforce their support to youth organizations from minorities and help them to sensitize their communities to linguistic and minority rights.
- ★ Remove barriers to political representation and self-representation when there are no mechanisms that support the specific needs of minority members.

### **In regard to language and education:**

- ★ Develop legal instruments that go beyond the international human and minority rights instruments to fulfil the educational needs of minorities.
- ★ Combat stigma around minority and regional languages.
- ★ Foster mutual respect through inclusive language education within the formal educational system.
- ★ Facilitate education about minority issues and minority languages on all levels of the formal school curriculum, up to the academic level, and extend possibilities brought by possible exchange programmes for minorities.
- ★ Promote monolingual (minority language) or bi- or multilingual (minority and majority languages) schools within and beyond the area of settlement of minorities.

- ★ Guarantee the opportunity to study and research minorities and minority languages even in higher education, despite economic interests.
- ★ Revise textbooks and educational materials to include minorities and marginalised groups.
- ★ Support the production and availability of educational materials for minorities and minority languages.
- ★ Allocate funds to be used to formulate minority classes in schools with trained teachers as well as to train teachers with minority backgrounds in the first place.
- ★ Provide scholarships for minority children to safeguard and support their education no matter the economic background.
- ★ Guarantee the use of minority languages when dealing with administrative authorities and public services, opposing the minoritisation of minority languages by the country's dominant language.

### **In regard to social, economic and media dimension:**

- ★ Guarantee the legal protection of equal participation, treatment, and opportunities in society, and the legal recognition of minorities.
- ★ Protect the rights of minority groups to freedom of expression and information.
- ★ Support and increase the visibility of the minorities through adequate representation, e.g. in broadcasting media, written media, or multilingual signage in public space.
- ★ Eliminate the practice of geo-blocking audio-visual content to safeguard the right to enjoy culture and entertainment in one's own language.
- ★ Support of online tools to promote minorities in social and online media, in order for minority members to access all information, have freedom of speech and have equal opportunities.

## FURTHER READINGS

- ★ *Minority Issues in Europe: Rights, Concepts, Policy* (Volume 1). By Tove H. Malloy (ed.), 2013.
- ★ *Minority Issues in Europe: New Ideas and Approaches* (Volume 2). By Tove H. Malloy and Caitlin Boulter (eds.), 2019.
- ★ *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*. Council of Europe. [www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages](http://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages)
- ★ *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*. Council of Europe. [www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/at-a-glance](http://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/at-a-glance)
- ★ *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. United Nations. [www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights](http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights)
- ★ *Minority SafePack Initiative (MSPI)*. [www.minority-safepack.eu](http://www.minority-safepack.eu)
- ★ *Article 30 of the Convention of the Right of the Child*. [www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx)

**YOUTH  
EMPOWERMENT  
AND STRONG  
MINORITY YOUTH  
ORGANISATIONS**



**"QUALITY AND MEANINGFUL  
PARTICIPATION OF MINORITY  
YOUTH STARTS LONG BEFORE THE  
INDIVIDUALS ACTUALLY VOICE  
THEIR OPINIONS OR IDEAS."**



# LIFELONG LEARNING AND EMPOWERMENT: BEYOND FORMAL EDUCATION

With this chapter, we aim to highlight the importance of youth empowerment and strong and sustainable minority youth organisations as premises for social change. Quality and meaningful participation of minority youth starts long before the individuals actually voice their opinions or ideas. In order for minority youth to feel empowered and eager to express their opinions and ideas, there is a need for an environment where they can grow without discrimination and where their identities, cultures and languages are not only promoted but recognized and valued. Establishing an open environment should be the guiding principle of any kind of action orientated towards minority youth. This should include awareness-raising activities, training courses and events that promote and encourage minority youth engagement through peer-to-peer transfer of knowledge and skills.

Continuous empowerment and support are necessary to give all minority youth the possibility to become actors of social change. Youth organisations can offer this much needed support that allows minority youth to start identifying, understanding and advocating on issues important to them and their communities.

**Non-formal education (NFE)** is an integral part of lifelong learning processes and can take place in a variety of learning environments. It is not intended as a replacement of formal education but rather as a complement. In comparison to traditional formal education the advantage of NFE is that it is flexible and adaptable. Therefore, it offers many possibilities to support the personal development of individuals beyond traditional education.

NFE is open to learners of any age, origin or life situation and can be used to address a variety of personal interests and aims. It is learner-oriented, experience-centred, holistic and based on a democratic, voluntary and participatory approach. It aims to develop a variety of skills, increase self-reflection and boost self-esteem, thus empowering and supporting learners to grow and mature as individuals and as active members of society.

## EMPOWERMENT AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

The capacity to learn and reflect on new information on your own is the basis for having a healthy critical attitude of one's surroundings, social norms and power mechanisms in place. NFE can play a key role in acquiring and improving these skills as well as in enhancing knowledge and in enabling individuals to change their attitudes. NFE can support individuals to learn to think critically for themselves and adapt to a continuously changing environment and the challenges of modern society.

While fundamental for the growth of a young person, formal educational systems are often lagging behind when it comes to inclusion, addressing specific needs and providing quality education especially for young minority members. NFE can remedy these shortcomings by addressing the needs of minority youth and certain aspects of social inclusion and diversity that regulated institutions lack.

In its daily work, YEN uses non-formal **intercultural education** as a process to empower minority youth.

Most of the participants engaged in activities of YEN underline that while the formal educational system provided them with limited knowledge regarding social inclusion and diversity, and that NFE much more successfully satisfied their needs for personal development for them as members of minority communities. For example, in seminars, YENies grow an awareness as representatives of their minorities as they are invited to share information and experiences about their

## DEVELOPING COMPETENCES

These alternative forms of education are especially valuable for those at risk of social exclusion, such as minority youth. **NFE creates opportunities and space to improve self-esteem and self-awareness, to cultivate a strong minority identity and to provide moral support and encouragement.** It also helps in empowering minority youth by facilitating opportunities where they can voice their ideas, engage in decision making processes and expand their knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities needed for becoming active members of society. A YENie noted that by engaging in the NFE activity, they “had the possibility to think outside of the box and it opened [their] eyes on some things about [themselves].” Another YENie commented that the focus on teamwork in NFE “makes us feel more comfortable and included.” A majority of

communities. Often international activities are actually the place where minority youth are confronted with other minority communities for the first time, and all of a sudden, they go through a self-realisation process and learn to see themselves as representatives of their own minority and take the responsibility that stands behind that. This increases their knowledge and awareness about their own minority and their minority identity. Moreover, more than two thirds of participants at YEN seminars believe that their participation has enhanced their knowledge about other minorities.

participants of YEN events highlight the fact that they have improved or gained NFE skills. What is more, minority youth have indicated that they see their positive experience with NFE methods as enriching and as something that they lack in formal education. They highlighted the importance of interventions at school and inclusion of NFE methods into classrooms as a way to promote awareness on human rights and minority rights for young people.

NFE gives minority youth the possibility to engage in interactive, experience and experimentation-based activities that boost their creativity, curiosity and responsibility. **The possibility to exchange experiences in a youth-to-youth environment that promotes diversity and solidarity between different cultures and social groups, enhances the**

**skills and competences of young people from minorities and on the whole.** NFE in this setting leads to the development of communication skills, team working skills, adaptability, self-confidence and intercultural skills to mention just a few. These have proven especially beneficial for the development of minority youth, their understanding of their personal identity and sense of belonging. Experiencing NFE has proven to be empowering for minority youth as it boosts their self-awareness, broadens their knowledge about their own

communities and raises awareness about others that are facing similar challenges. “The training made a positive change for me, because I learned new experiences as how to work together with people from different cultures and backgrounds”, a YENie commented. It helps them become proud, responsible and active citizens and champions of their minorities and enhances the development of minority communities, thus benefiting all actors of society.

## SUSTAINABLE MINORITY YOUTH MOVEMENTS

Non-Formal Education is an effective tool for minority youth to gain acceptance and acknowledgement. Too often they find themselves in the role of a “subject or an issue” that decision-makers talk about as something to be solved rather than a group of people to interact with on the same level and see as competent partners and leaders for advancing solutions. Through NFE minority youth can develop skills and gain knowledge that support them in actively voicing their opinions and demanding to be heard.

**Engaging in activities that cover human rights education, intercultural dialogue, youth activism and mobilisation is especially relevant for minority youth as they support them in identifying, understanding and advocating for issues important to them and their communities.** Therefore, activities for minority youth

should include awareness-raising activities, training courses and events that promote and encourage minority youth development and engagement. Moreover, activities should be built in a way to show the value of pluralistic identities and stimulate the participants’ own awareness of their competencies. A good practise for this is to utilize and develop the capacities of minority youth in peer-to-peer transmission of knowledge and skills.

With the international events of YEN, minority youth have the opportunity to connect with youth who face similar obstacles and challenges, and to expand their skills to make a change, which YENies have underlined as very important.

Networking activities based on peer-to-peer education remain central for the building of stronger and more sustainable

minority youth movements and mobilisation of minority youth to express themselves and take action.

Minority youth cannot play an active role in shaping youth and minority policies and stake their position in their communities and the European society, when there are no activities that support, encourage and enable them to

do so. Therefore, it is necessary to offer activities that raise awareness about the importance of active and meaningful minority youth participation, activities that support minority youth to participate in the political, electoral and decision-making processes and activities that encourage networking and an exchange of good practices among themselves.

## PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS

Especially vital for young minority members is access to human rights education that in its core uncovers, addresses and shows ways to confront processes of discrimination and social exclusion. As it has been outlined in the previous chapters - many members of minority communities are facing social exclusion in their daily lives. Sharing and addressing these issues in a safe and age-appropriate environment helps minority youth to broaden their knowledge on the importance of minority/human rights, to become active in confronting these issues and develop a sense of individual self-respect as well as respect towards the rights of others. For example, through NFE, minority youth can familiarize themselves with legal documents, break them down and discuss and reflect how this impacts their lives. A YENie underlined this as extremely important: "We can use these documents as a tool when advocating for minority rights as human rights." It supports their quest for active citizenship and advocating for their own rights, and promotes the importance of solidarity not only between

different minority groups but also with other communities.

Participating in activities that are enhancing knowledge about other minorities and relevant legal frameworks and are providing space for participants to share their experience as young members of minority communities are of great importance. They contribute to empowerment and self-confidence encouraging youth to speak more freely about minority issues. Human rights education is a powerful tool that enables minority youth to better understand the role of human rights in their own contexts, but also to develop skills to identify violations of minority and human rights, to advocate and to defend them. „We can use this as a tool to stand up for our rights, we now know what we can demand, what is missing and hold someone accountable for violations of these rights;“ „This gives me input when I talk as a representative of my organisation;“ „It is important to bring the content of the document in a youth-friendly way so that

everyone understands,“ are just some of the statements of participants of YEN activities. It is beneficial for minority youth members to be involved in activities that empower them to acquire knowledge, skills and awareness and that enable them to understand, practise and defend minority and human rights. As it was underlined by

a YENie, "Learning about minority rights helped me understand that everyone can do something about the protection and promotion of minorities" and "It made me believe in my own strength and the belief that we can change something together."

## CONNECTING ACROSS BORDERS AND CULTURES

At YEN we believe that unconscious bias is one of the biggest disablers of diversity enhancement. This is why intercultural activities such as YEN seminars are so important. They provide opportunities for participants to experience intercultural learning and interact with peers coming from different backgrounds. It is crucial to connect across cultures and borders and to cultivate a culture of inclusion where mutual understanding and respect are vital as they form the basis to work towards an open, solidary and diverse Europe.

Through different activities of NFE young people can obtain qualities such as respect, curiosity, tolerance, empathy, intercultural awareness and skills for dialogue, but also self-reflection and critical thinking. As one participant rightly noticed "I understand the importance of critical thinking, but I realized I am not that critical as I thought." NFE provides participants a possibility to explore different concepts and learn about various cultures in a non-judgemental environment. This encourages their curiosity and motivates them to make sense of a complex world. It stimulates

their learning by providing opportunities to develop competences of critical thinking, and helps them to embrace values such as equality and diversity. Especially for minority youth the ability to reflect on their own assumptions, beliefs, and values is of fundamental importance as they are very often intertwined with their minority identity and thus with incorporated biases. Together with the acknowledgment of the multiple identities of others these are fundamental elements that can help in building mutual understanding, social cohesion and in finding allies for the protection of minority rights. "This experience marked me and I realised that it's really important for us, young people, to know and listen to the lived experiences of Roma community, so that we do everything possible in our lives to prevent the history of abuse from happening again. It is our responsibility and it's of great significance to tell their stories further so that we create a better present and future for minorities," said a participant that joined Dikh He Na Bister, a Roma Genocide Remembrance Initiative.



## PEACE-BUILDING AND SOLIDARITY

While on one hand empowering activities are crucial for minority youth to develop self-confidence and initiative, NFE can also contribute to peace-building among different communities and help in closing the divide between society at large and marginalised groups. To cite YENies: “Thanks to our event we broke a lot of clichés and stereotypes about our Breton community and some participants even said they would not see us the same way they used to;” „I really believe that this project has an important meaning for both minorities and majority because it’s a very unique possibility to sit together, share our ideas and express our common concerns.”

“An inclusive society where we are all equal in dignity and rights will never be achievable if minorities remain the only group fighting for minority rights. This was also noticeable

## ON THE VERGE OF A CRISIS

The year 2020 with the COVID-19 pandemic however, had an unforeseen and extraordinary impact on all activities mentioned above. This pandemic amplified inequalities for minority youth and has acted as a catalyser for hate speech, negative stereotyping and scapegoating. The pandemic has aggravated the access to healthcare, information, and education, and has brought to light an impactful digital gap. In addition, it has had a significant impact on NFE activities. Events had to be

by participants: „More and more I am realising the need for tighter international cooperation of minorities (and majorities) in order to oppose the negative political trends in Europe when it comes to the matter of acceptance of otherness.”

For advancing the culture of inclusion, empathy and solidarity, critical thinking is crucial. It is a tool that can and should be used to fight the status quo, and encourage young people to continue challenging stereotypes and cognitive biases. Only by being aware of our own biases, preconceptions, stereotypes and prejudices can we meaningfully contribute to strengthening democracy and building tolerant, peaceful and inclusive societies: societies where the needs of minority youth are not only appreciated, but recognized and guaranteed.

cancelled or were only implemented in a much less impactful online format which indicated the negative effect this has had on the scale of empowerment and identity formation of minority youth. This situation has demonstrated – once again – how important personal exchanges and face-to-face encounters are for the implementation of intercultural NFE activities and how crucial it is to enable all youth to travel and participate in them. Online meetings and webinars have proved to be an effective

short-term solution, to those who have access to the internet. But it has become evident that they will not be able to replace in-person meetings and exchanges that foster real change and building of closer and stronger networks and skills.

In April 2020, for the first time in the history of YEN, we had to cancel the most important YEN event of the year, the Easter Seminar, which has been taking place every year since 1963. More event cancellations or postponements would follow in 2020. That meant that out of four events planned for YEN’s work plan, *Think diverse! Minority youth in a changing world*, only one event was held, namely the Kick-Off event *Think equally*, held in Csolnok/Tscholnok, Hungary, in February of that year.

Swiftly, to reach out and still provide platforms for youth to learn, discuss and be(come) involved, it was decided by the Board and Office to hold a series of online activities during summer, dubbed *Think beyond borders – YEN Digital Summer*. To support these unforeseen changes in times of an ongoing pandemic, the flexibility and approval for the different use of funding, in

this case by the European Youth Foundation, was very much appreciated. The Digital Summer was positively reviewed by the participants. However, with this experience we know that digital meetings are only an addition to physical workshops or can be a plan B in exceptional circumstances. They however cannot provide the same level of connectedness and engagement of participants as physical workshops at YEN events. A YENie noted this too, and said that the online group dynamics were good because their “online group had met at earlier physical YEN events.” The YENie continued that “without events where time is spent together and with many team building activities, online group discussions cannot achieve the same level of engagement and group dynamics, and without the physical presence of each other, discussions are more difficult to get started and achieve full potential.” Thus, the pandemic has brought new challenges for bringing minority youth together in events to share experiences, connect, enhance knowledge, expand skills, and to empower each other.



### DID YOU KNOW...?

...that Irish summer colleges are organised for Irish speakers where they can learn about leadership and self-discipline and through promotion and learning of a language become active citizens and get more opportunities for employment?

...that every summer the Roma youth organisation ternYpe organises an educational activity "Dikh He Na Bister" that brings together Roma and non-Roma youth from all over Europe and encourages and empowers them to work together in order to effectively combat anti-Romani prejudices and advance Roma rights?

...that YEN's project Minority Messengers was a bridge between non-formal and formal education through organising visits of Minority Messengers to schools and delivering sessions on specific minority issues with the use of NFE methods?

...that in June 2019 in Tavankut, Serbia, the Croatian-Serb and Serbian-Croat minorities held a football match to promote peaceful cooperation and mutual understanding?

...that youth organisation of Burgenland Croats in Austria – HAK annually organises a festival „Dan Mladine“ where you can discover more about Burgenland-Croatian and Croatian culture and music?

## YOUTH ACTIVISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The above-described empowerment of minority youth and a strong minority identity lay the foundation for active citizenship. At YEN, we consider that youth work plays a vital role in the development of active citizenship and democracy, and leads to direct improvement of lived realities on a local level. Through volunteering and youth activism, young people contribute to a culture of cooperation and solidarity, exercise their right for democratic participation in its fullest form and contribute to shaping their communities.

Youth activism can come in different forms and shapes, and can impact different parts of society. Two forms that YEN is supporting regularly are **volunteering** (in and through youth organisations) and engagement in the civic space. Much like other European youth organisations, YEN sees youth activism as being intrinsically linked to solidarity and cooperation. Especially in the development of strong minority communities, cooperation plays a crucial role.

### COOPERATION IS KEY TO SOCIAL CHANGE

As we illustrated in the previous chapters, many autochthonous minorities in Europe face discrimination, hate speech, prejudiced treatment and hate crime, and it is important for these minorities to cooperate and act together in order to advance minority rights. Therefore, this cooperation and support between different minority youth is an important aspect that YEN tries to enhance through means of youth activism. One very effective tool for this are international youth exchanges, as we saw previously. There, participants do not only get to know each other but together learn important skills for cooperation and their common

fight for minority youth rights. Or as a YENie put it: "Youth exchanges are not only about representing my own organisation, nation or culture, but it is about uniting and connecting to each other. Promotion and awareness of other cultures and languages gives you an energy, a drive."

# MINORITY RIGHTS AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

A topic where youth is at the forefront is climate change and the future of minority youth and how it is affected by it. It is highly interlinked with minority issues and is something that will grow more visible and urgent in minority regions in the coming years. However, the climate crisis and minority rights are not supported enough yet by overall available data. For minority communities to receive the support they need, the impact of the climate crisis on minorities must first be sufficiently documented and recognized – by researchers, development and environmental NGOs, governments and intergovernmental organisations.

Climate change does not only affect people with minority backgrounds, but society as a whole. Nonetheless, there can be some specificities where minorities are and will be more affected by it than others, as many minorities live in more marginal exposed areas that seem to be seeing more climate changes, they can be hit harder and are more susceptible to the impacts of the changing climate. Taking the case of the Romansh, traditionally living in the Swiss Alps, they are very dependent on tourism. It is the most important source of revenue for the region, but with less and less snowy winters the economy is changing. Additionally, the



summer drought also affects the local agriculture and there are new natural dangers awaiting as grave landslides. This will cause youth to continue to leave the area where Romansh are traditionally settled, since there is a worsening socio-economic outlook to the future. Another existential danger is to be located in continental Europe's north. When the sea-levels rise, the areas where for example Danish, Breton, Kashubian or Frisian communities live are highly affected. Life in these regions would become severely limited to impossible. Or as a YENie described it: "Who wants to save the language (minority), needs to save its territory." In addition to these existential threats for minorities, there will simply be too few resources and not enough energy from societal and governmental levels left, which would be needed to support the work of the minorities.

Promoting open youth-to-youth communication and multicultural bridge building by building coalitions and cooperating with different minority youth organisations from various regions can only enhance the development of all minority communities and benefit all actors.

## NOTHING FOR YOUTH WITHOUT YOUTH

Much in contrast to this, minority youth activism is often considered traditionalistic, inaccessible and reactionary and is used as a source for populist movements to distort the public perception and feed into the idea of close-minded nationalistic minorities that want to preserve their culture at the cost of society as a whole. A characterization that is untrue for most of the minority youth organisations. Their activism instead shows that they play an important part of a mosaic of a diverse society, where the beauty is constituted of different gems, not by one alone.

Social change will evolve fully when youth will not only be perceived as the future but as stakeholders of the present, and their ideas and opinions start to be taken seriously and included into decision-making processes at all levels. We see that youth participation is increasingly recognised. However, sometimes, youth participation is misinterpreted as for example inclusion of youth in projects/events only, whereas youth still do not get to have an active say in decision-making processes. In the context

What YENies take home from international youth activities is this empowerment through volunteer work, participating in training and earning new experiences of cooperation, and thus initiating social change through their further work on the ground locally.

of democracy and active citizenship, this is the crucial aspect of "participation" – the part of sharing responsibilities, tasks and decisions on an equal level.

While achieving participation in a self-established youth organisation lies in the nature of the organisations themselves, the intermediary steps of participation are harder to claim, be it in political institutions, adult civil-society organisations or the economy. Participation as well as self-representation is still not a given fact, but something that needs to be fought for – as youth, as minority, but especially as minority youth. Nonetheless, it is a fight that is worth fighting, because nothing should be done for youth, without including and acting upon youth opinions.



# AMPLIFYING MINORITY VOICES

Youth is one of the driving forces in the solidarity movement and cares about a united and peaceful Europe for future generations. Nevertheless, for many years now, YEN is continuously observing that there are few opportunities for young people from minorities in decision-making processes and policy development. Therefore, we emphasize the importance to provide spaces and opportunities where minority youth can voice their opinions, ideas and solutions. We emphasize the need to create opportunities for more accurate and increased representation of minority youth on all levels. To work towards equal participation of all differences among young people must be taken into consideration. Minority youth are facing multiple discrimination when it comes to quality representation, on the one hand because of their age and on the other hand because of their minority identity.

This leads to a general feeling among minority youth that decisions are taken behind closed doors and many stakeholders act for their own interest and not in order to benefit the public. "Although youth is often depicted as passive and disinterested, we can honestly say that young people do care, they do have political opinions and they want their voices to be heard. Now, not only when we are old," said a YENie. Minority youth is not something to include only as

a decorative element or because of a quota, much like every other marginalised group, minority youth is a group that has to be taken serious for what they are and what they can contribute to society.

Through mechanisms such as the co-management structure of the Joint Council on Youth of the Council of Europe, young people are able to raise awareness and add their unique insights on vital topics. These can be inclusion of marginalised people, shrinking civic space, digitalisation, sustainable development, climate change and other subjects which are crucial not only for young people and their future, but humanity as a whole. However, not only internationally, but also on the smaller scale, minority youth continuously need to fight for representation.

Autochthonous minorities have been living in these lands for thousands of years and their traditions and languages carry ancestral knowledge linked to these environments. With climate change a major part of a minority identity bound to traditional knowledge and the surrounding environment is lost as specific words describing specific concepts continue disappearing following unpreventable lifestyle adaptations. Finally, this leads to slow extinction of a whole minority language and comprehension of the world. This results in a loss of specific identity of young people and unification of minority communities, as well as a lack of cultural, biological and linguistic diversity at large, as languages and communities disappear.

The fight for minority rights and climate justice are not two different topics, but closely interlinked. However, it seems that – stirred by the Fridays for Future movement – minority youth (organisations) are much more aware of the crisis than their adult counterparts. This is why several of YEN member organisations started actions to clean up the region they live in by collecting litter left in nature, or to organize their events in a more sustainable way, renouncing the use of plastic and encouraging the participants to travel eco-friendly. Hopefully, this will inspire more minority organisations to address this topic.

In addition to all of the already existing challenges minorities face and challenges they also face as young people; this is yet another one. Discrimination against indigenous peoples and minorities makes it harder for them to cope with the impacts of climate change. Climate-crisis is not only a problem the youth shall solve in future, it has to be an intergenerational approach that has to be acted on now. Young people do play vital roles in supporting societies and fighting the climate crisis. Nevertheless, recently the sort of core actors of the environmental movement have primarily been those with privileges, means, and status. Widespread discrimination, environmental racism and government neglect are just a few of the reasons why issues of minorities are not highlighted enough. It is time that the important role minority and indigenous communities play in preserving nature is recognized.

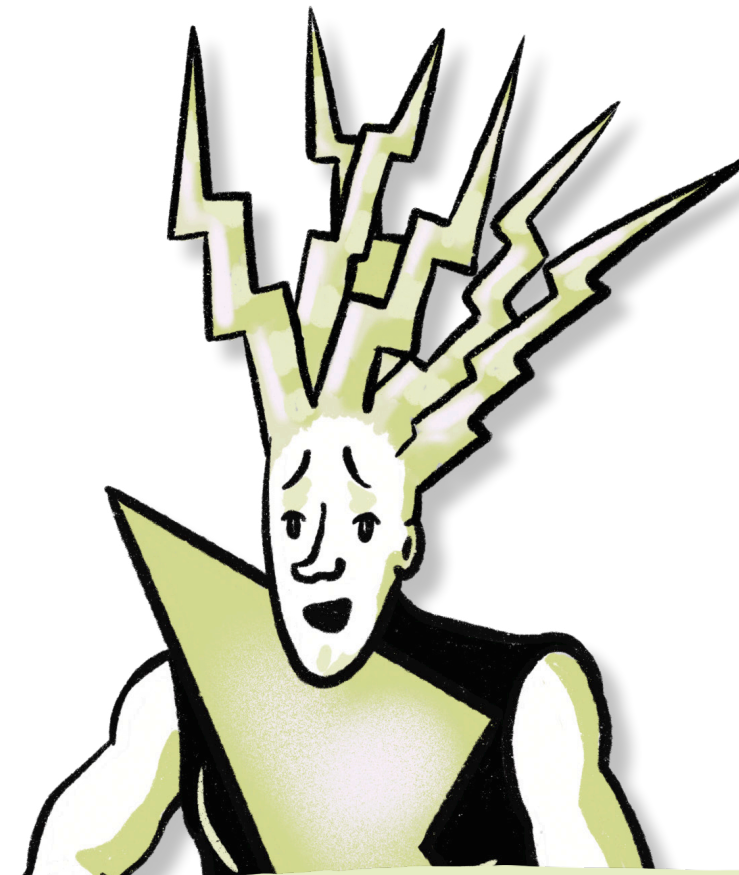
Minorities and minority youth need to be included in climate related efforts. Having the opportunity to share and act on their concerns about the climate crisis can not only boost young minority members' self-efficacy, hopefulness and resilience, but it also builds strong minority identities. Minority youth need to be trusted for who they are, their knowledge and understanding, their specific challenges and the experiences they bring to the cause are vital to understand the needs of nature and the needs of everyone.

## IN CONCLUSION

Youth activism can thus be described as a tool to support minority youth and overcome the problem of instrumentalization and misplacement of youth. It is a way to utilize minority youth's potential as agents of change and empower them to reach their full capability and ability to stand alongside their peers. In order to be effective, it requires not only sharing of power and privilege but also providing spaces to express opinions and contribute with their lived experiences as minority youth. But first and foremost, it means decision makers have to listen and take action. Minority youth organisations, working

with rights-holders and duty-bearers that recognize their work and impact, can change attitudes and behaviours that support and sustain social exclusion, discrimination and inequality and the unaccountable use and abuse of power.

Societies need to stop looking at minority youth as a problem that needs to be fixed and rather than talking about them, encourage an open dialogue with them. A dialogue that does not focus on differences but the positive contributions minority youth is making and their important role in building peaceful and inclusive societies.



### DID YOU KNOW...?

...that in 2017, the launch of the gathering of over 1 million signatures for the EU-citizens-initiative Minority SafePack Initiative started with a series of flash mobs organised by the participants of YEN's Diversity Festival #Celebrating Pluralism"?

...that participation is also a crucial part of YEN's own basic principles as all of its activities are based on self-organisation and all decisions are taken in a democratic way by assuming responsibility and ownership of the process?

...that the Council of Europe has a mechanism in place that provides an opportunity for young people to contribute to policy making with their experience and expertise?

...that you can buy Frisian LGBTQIA+ flags, and part of the profit goes to the yearly pride event Pink Saturday?

...that after campaigning for it, the 2021 UK census will add the box 'Roma' besides 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' for ethnic self-identification?

# RECOMMENDATIONS



As YEN we want to share some recommendations to support minorities in their lifelong learning and empowerment beyond formal education.

**Therefore, In the light of the above, we invite everyone, in their own capacities, to:**

- ★ Acknowledge non-formal learning and recognize the abilities and competences of youth activists and volunteers.
- ★ Encourage, support, strengthen and promote activities which support minority youth to participate in the political and electoral process.
- ★ Create space for young people to become active citizens through empowerment, mobilization, self-organization, self-representation and participation.
- ★ Support activities that raise awareness of the importance of active and meaningful minority youth participation.
- ★ Encourage networking among youth from different (minority) backgrounds and the exchange of practices.
- ★ Acknowledge the importance of minority youth in peaceful, tolerant, knowledgeable and inclusive societies.

- ★ Increase the capacities of minority youth organisations in order to strengthen their participation in decision making processes at the local, regional, national, and international level.
- ★ Highlight the various means to actively participate in the decision-making processes.
- ★ Recognize the legitimacy of minority youth organisations and their work in advancing the rights of minority youth.
- ★ Strengthen the opportunities and sustainable structures for active dialogue.
- ★ Highlight the positive contributions of minority youth to peace-building and conflict-resolution processes.

## FURTHER READINGS

- ★ *Solidarity and diversity in the wake of Corona*. By Youth of European Nationalities, 2020. [www.yeni.org/2020/04/03/solidarity-and-diversity-in-the-wake-of-corona-statement-from-the-youth-of-european-nationalities](http://www.yeni.org/2020/04/03/solidarity-and-diversity-in-the-wake-of-corona-statement-from-the-youth-of-european-nationalities). A statement on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on minority youth.
- ★ *Youth participation toolkit*. By Youth of European Nationalities, 2019. [www.yeni.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/toolkit-youth-participation\\_YEN.pdf](http://www.yeni.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/toolkit-youth-participation_YEN.pdf). A booklet on the concept and methods of youth participation.
- ★ *Demands of young people from minorities in Europe*. By participants of the YEN Easter Seminar 2019, 2019. [www.yeni.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/demand-ES19\\_en-1.pdf](http://www.yeni.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/demand-ES19_en-1.pdf). A series of demands for youth participation YENies voiced about topics relevant to and chosen by them.
- ★ *Resolution on key issues concerning European youth*. By Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations, Phiren Amenca, Voices of Young Refugees in Europe (VYRE) and Youth of European Nationalities (YEN), 2018. [www.yeni.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Resolution\\_On-Key\\_Issues\\_Concerning\\_European\\_Youth\\_en.pdf](http://www.yeni.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Resolution_On-Key_Issues_Concerning_European_Youth_en.pdf). A resolution for promotion of youth participation, intercultural understanding, preservation and development of the rights of marginalised and vulnerable groups.
- ★ *The YEN White Paper on Minority Rights*. By Youth of European Nationalities, 2014. [www.yeni.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/150330\\_Weissbuch\\_englisch\\_web.pdf](http://www.yeni.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/150330_Weissbuch_englisch_web.pdf).
- ★ *#IVS4Peace: Inclusive Voluntary Service for Peace Toolkit*. By Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service, Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations, Youth of European Nationalities, Compagnons Bâtisseurs Belgium, Egyesek, Elix, Solidarités Jeunesses. tbp 2021.



"MINORITY YOUTH DOES NOT NEED ANYONE  
TO MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD, WHAT  
THEY NEED IS SPACE AND OPPORTUNITIES  
TO RAISE IT THEMSELVES."



In this state of play we have written on the current topics important to minority youth in Europe, based on data and experiences from minority youth collected during a three-year period, from 2018 to 2020. These topics have a wide range, are as diverse as they can be, and are based on the needs, challenges and aspirations of minority youth. We have gathered them in three broader themes of identity, minority rights, and youth empowerment and activism. These are outlined by means of case studies, challenges and specific recommendations to every topic. The report reflects on the challenges defined in YEN's White Paper published in 2014 and articulates newly existing problem areas.

As we are writing this document, Europe and the world is clutched by the COVID-19 pandemic. Since its beginning, we have observed that the crisis has acted as a catalyser for dis- and misinformation, a lack of representation, unequal opportunities, negative stereotyping, discrimination, and for policies that fail to respect minorities and human rights. In April 2020, we have called upon solidarity and respect of diversity and minority rights. We repeat this call for solidarity and diversity, the pandemic still lays bare the inequalities within society and jeopardizes opportunities for minority youth in all aspects of their lives, and the aftermath will have long lasting effects on minority youth and their futures.

If we have learnt anything from the past year 2020, it is that disasters discriminate. But they are also an opportunity. Seeing

how they affect not only vulnerable groups but society at large, they can be a cause that could potentially bring different socio-economic groups together in solidarity and empathy. Coming together is critical because the issues that we face are interconnected, and one social group's rights cannot be improved without resolving the vulnerability of the other. It is not enough to elevate a handful of youth individuals on a pedestal of participatory privilege and forget that a majority of young people still cannot access their rights.

Minority youth does not need anyone to make their voices heard, what they need is space and opportunities to raise it themselves.

In November 2017, the membership of the European Youth Forum adopted the "Resolution on Key Issues Concerning European Youth", brought forward by the four youth networks - Alliance of European Voluntary Service Organisations, Phiren Amenca, Voices of Young Refugees in Europe and Youth of European Nationalities - acknowledging the need for more inclusion and diversity in Europe. It was a strong sign, having the biggest international youth umbrella organisation carrying our mission. Three years later, we renew our call for the promotion of diversity and equity through increasing awareness, encouraging collaboration, sharing best practices and concrete actions on the rights of youth.

We call for more solidarity, compassion and support for minority rights.

During the entire span of the Minority Messengers Project our youth network was actively involved in initiating, promoting and supporting the Minority SafePack Initiative (MSPI), one of the most important minority-related European Citizens' Initiative in Europe in the last decades that called for promotion and improvement of minority rights in the European Union, in this the rights of minority youth. The Initiative not only managed to receive more than one million statements of support, but it also reached a national threshold in not 7 – as required – but 11 member states.

In addition to the public mobilisation, the MSPI actually became the first European Citizens' Initiative to have a plenary debate and the very first one that obtained the formal endorsement of the European Parliament, with an overwhelming two-thirds majority as well as the support from governmental bodies throughout Europe – even before the Commission took a position. Despite all of this the European Commission on 14 January 2021 decided not to act upon the proposed legal framework for the protection of minority rights, leaving the EU without any jurisdiction over the regulation of minority protection or a coherent minority politics. The European Commission was not able to find real actions in the motto of the EU „United in Diversity“ and remained passive about the protection of minority rights defending its position that the EU's general framework on the protection of human

rights is sufficient for the protection of individuals belonging to minorities.

The decision of the Commission to not follow up on any of the nine legislative proposals actively contributed to building even more barriers for minority youth in accessing spaces and opportunities to take active part in their communities and European society as a whole. On top of that it also failed to contribute to successfully meeting the vision behind the European Youth Goals and the framework of the new EU Youth Strategy that is all about “engaging, connecting, empowering”.

No matter the decision, there is no doubt that the Initiative was widely embraced by youth, showing that young people urge the need for protection of minority rights in the EU. This youth activism demonstrated the will and drive of young people to carry out the values of the EU, where ethnic, national, cultural, and linguistic variety is seen as an enrichment for societies. The demands put forward in the Initiative would have brought a significant change for the better of the whole of society, in support of minorities and as an enrichment for the majorities. In times when human rights are globally being violated, a clear signal demonstrating unambiguous solidarity and commitment to protection of minority rights should have been sent.



We urge the EU to take responsibility and become a genuine promoter of cultural and linguistic diversity across Europe.

One of the keys to empower minority youth to claim their rights is and will be skills development. Only equipped with essential skills, attitudes and knowledge young people from minority backgrounds can take action to access, defend, apply and promote their rights as and when needed.

Nevertheless, the society's effort should not be limited only to the process of empowerment of minority youth. If minority youth are to remain at the forefront of social change, increased obstacles and resistance to the full recognition and respect of minority rights need to be addressed and systemic discrimination and ageism recognized by actors on different levels. As YEN, we strongly believe in the importance of recognition of the role of youth organisations as advocates for youth rights. Youth organisations remain a key actor in advancing young people's access to and enjoyment of their rights and freedoms. They provide an environment and ensure opportunities where young people can inform themselves about youth rights and the need to claim and exercise them. When empowered and given the right opportunities, youth are effective drivers of change and can meaningfully contribute to healthy democracies and building of peaceful and inclusive societies. Human rights education is essential for not only creating a culture of human rights in general, but for providing space for minority

youth to deepen the understanding of mechanisms behind social exclusion and discrimination, and develop responses to the violations of human dignity that affect them directly. Changing attitudes is and will be the main mission and lasting contribution of YEN in advancing minority youth rights.

YEN remains committed to its fight for the protection and promotion of minority rights. Nevertheless, we should not be doing it alone. Monumental changes cannot be done alone.

### Anyone can be a SuperYENie.

As members of minorities, we continuously show that our strength is in building alliances, and we encourage the world to show empathy, and not allow solidarity and diversity to remain just slogans but rather strive to live up to their potential. Social inclusion should be the main guiding values of any work with young people and should be integrated into all aspects of any organisation's culture. Minority rights are human rights. They require standards that do not merely tolerate diversity, but encourage expressions of identity and cultivate the respect for minorities. In a culture based on the principles of human rights that actively fights against discrimination, voices of young people need not only to be heard but listened to. The experiences and views of young people from minorities should be at the core of any change.



We are not only defined by our identity. We are not only worth as much as our experience as a minority. We are not only here to educate others.

**WE ARE HERE NOW AND WE WANT TO CONTRIBUTE.**





## GLOSSARY

**Discrimination:** unfair or prejudicial treatment or any kind of exclusion or distinction based on any ground such as ethnicity, race, culture, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical or intellectual disability or any other characteristics.

**Empowerment:** increasing of the mental, political, social, or economic strength and skills of individuals and communities. In the document the term is used in relation to providing marginalised individuals and groups space and opportunity to develop competences needed to claim their rights in order to participate fully in society.

**Equality:** strives for equal opportunity by treating people the same, no matter their specific needs.

**Equity:** strives for equal opportunity by treating people according to their specific needs.

**European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages:** covenant drafted by the Council of Europe in 1992 that offers protection for

regional or minority languages. The Charter essentially is a list of measures that Council of Europe member states can implement to protect regional and minority languages within their territory.

**Formal education:** structured education and training system that runs from pre-primary and primary through secondary school and on to university. As a rule, it takes place at general or vocational educational institutions and leads to certification.

**Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities:** a treaty drafted by the Council of Europe in 1995 that offers protection for national minorities. The Framework Convention promotes equality of persons belonging to national minorities concerning economic, social, political and cultural life. It also sets conditions for national minorities to express, preserve and develop their culture and identity.

**Human rights:** rights that universally apply to all human beings and cannot be taken away. Human rights are inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, and describe certain standards of human dignity and values. Fundamental human rights include, among others, the right to life, freedom of expression, the right to non-discrimination, or the right to fair trial.



**Identity:** a sense of who an individual or a group is. It refers to characteristics, values, attitudes, aspirations, memories and experiences that define a person's or group's sense of themselves. As such, identity is formed by a variety of layers and is not static but develops over time.

**Intercultural learning:** refers to the process of acquiring knowledge, attitudes and skills that are needed when interacting with people from cultures and communities different from our own.

**Intersectionality:** a framework for understanding how aspects of a person's identities combine to create multiple intersections of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality as a notion was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, legal scholar and critical race theorist, who brought to light the dynamics of discrimination and underlined the importance of acknowledgment of distinctively different experiences people of different individual identities have and experiences of discrimination they endure.

**Kin-state minority:** a minority living in one state that has a related community which forms the majority in another state. For example, the German minority in Denmark has Germany as a kin-state, or the Serbian minority in Croatia has Serbia as a kin-state.

**Minority:** there is no universally agreed definition of the term "minority". The term refers to a group of people in a non-dominant position of power and not necessarily defined by their actual number. In this document the word "minority" specifically refers to autochthonous, national, ethnic and linguistic minorities in Europe that came into being as a result of developments in European history, changing state borders and other historical events. To these mentioned groups belong also peoples of Europe without a nation state and living as a minority in the territory of a state.

**Minority rights:** rights that can be described as any collective and/or individual rights applied to minorities and their members. Aims can be for example, non-discrimination, equality and equity, protection and promotion of the minority identity. Thus, minority rights include both rights relating to the needs of humans in general but also rights addressing the specific situation of minority members.

**Non-formal education:** refers to structured learning-process taking place outside the formal educational setting. It covers a wide range of educational activities designed to improve a variety of skills, competences, attitudes and knowledge.





**Non-kin-state minority:** a minority living in one state that does not have a related community which forms the majority in another state. For example, Kashubians, Aromanians, Frisians, or Romansh.

**Regional or minority languages:** the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages defines these as languages (1) traditionally used within a given territory of a state by nationals of that state who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the state's population, and (2) different from the official language(s) of that state, while they include neither dialects of the official language(s) of the state nor the languages of migrants.

**Self-representation:** an empowering act in which a person, no matter the background and position of power, speaks for themselves and represents their own interests.

**Stateless people:** a person who does not have any nationality and therefore is stateless. Especially minority members face statelessness, and form three quarters of stateless people around the world. To be stateless means that a person does not enjoy basic human rights, such as the right to citizenship, democratic participation, healthcare, employment or education.

**Treaty:** an international agreement between states. For example, an agreement, charter, code, or framework convention.

**Volunteering:** describes the voluntary work and/or participation in a non-profit or community organisation. Volunteering is considered as a tool to improve active citizenship and democratic, political participation.

**Youth:** there is no universal definition of the term. The meaning of the term "youth" varies in different societies around the world. The Council of Europe and the European Commission work with the period from 13 until 30 years, the United Nations from 15 until 24 years. YEN focuses on a group of young people between 16 and 35 years old.

**Youth activism:** refers to actions taken by young people to impact social change.

**Youth participation:** refers to the involvement of young people in processes, institutions and decisions that affect their lives. The Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life describes participation as having the rights, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engaging in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.



CCJ	Advisory Council on Youth of the Council of Europe
CMJ	Joint Council on Youth of the Council of Europe
CoE	Council of Europe
ECMI	European Centre for Minority Issues
ECRML	European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
EU	European Union
EYF	European Youth Foundation
FCNM	Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
MSPI	Minority SafePack Initiative
NFE	Non-formal education
UN	United Nations
YEN	Youth of European Nationalities
YFJ	European Youth Forum





### Sources 2018

- Report Kick-Off Seminar 2018 – “Message in a Bottle”
- Evaluation Kick-Off Seminar 2018 – “Message in a Bottle”
- Report Easter Seminar 2018 – “Winging the shoes – preparing minority messengers to fly!”
- Evaluation Easter Seminar 2018 – “Winging the shoes – preparing minority messengers to fly!”
- Report Autumn Seminar 2018 – “Long Minority Stories Short”
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- Resolution on the developments and implementation of the Minority SafePack Initiative – adopted by YEN’s General Assembly 2018
- Recommendations/statements of YEN for UN Forum on Minority Issues 2018
- Resolution of JungeSpitzen (member organisation of YEN) on language policy
- Evaluations of Minority Messenger visits 2018
- Questionnaires from Minority Messenger visits 2018

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- Report Kick-Off Seminar 2019 – “Step up!”
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- Report Easter Seminar 2019 – “Speak up!”
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- Statement of YEN on the Council of Europe Budget Cuts, May 2019
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- Quotes from participants about the Autumn Seminar 2019 – “Gather up!”
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### Sources 2020

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- Evaluation Kick-Off Seminar 2020 – “Think equally”
- Outcomes from the HUB workshop session at Kick-Off Seminar 2020 – “Think equally”
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- Feedback discussion group 1 Online Training on Combating Populism 2020: “Think Beyond Borders”
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- Podcast MYnority MY Say! Episode “A Lusatian Sorb about digitalisation”
- Podcast MYnority MY Say! Episode “A German Sintesa talking about Sinti and Roma”
- Focus groups’ interviews on discrimination
- Statement of YEN regarding “Solidarity and Diversity in the wake of Corona”
- Statement of YEN in support of the Minority SafePack Initiative 2020
- #YENsdays from 2018 to 2020
- Comments and reactions on YEN’s social media from 2018 to 2020





**“Minority Youth in Europe: A State of Play”** is a report calling attention to the long-standing challenges faced by minority youth. It provides insight into issues that minority youth are facing in their daily lives, and explains the mechanisms behind it.

The report offers the ever missed and overlooked minority youth perspective on issues relevant for minority communities as well as society as a whole. It should not be read as a manual providing measures and solutions to improving the situation of minority youth but rather as a starting point. The report contributes to a better understanding of what is needed to create spaces and opportunities that are participatory, inclusive and diverse. For this to happen, first and foremost policy gaps have to be identified and transnational barriers and challenges of minority youth documented, recognized and acknowledged.

To this end, the report offers a perspective on minority youth not only to non-minority members, but also to minority organizations themselves, hopefully starting a broader dialogue on the topic of minority youth rights and contributing to a positive attitude on cultural diversity among young people, regardless if they belong to a minority or not.



**YEN JEV**

Youth of European Nationalities  
Jugend Europäischer Volksgruppen