

Item 6. Procedures and Mechanisms: Capacity-building and awareness-raising (c)

Statement by Remina Aleksieva, Youth and Environment Europe, at the 28th Meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention

Dear all,

On behalf of [Youth and Environment Europe \(YEE\)](#), I would like to present some recommendations and lessons learned on improving awareness-raising and building capacity within European youth in the context of access to information, access to justice and public participation in environmental matters.

In order to implement effective youth participation, first and foremost, it must be acknowledged that young people play a fundamental role in the decision-making processes in the context of demanding ambitious climate action and advocating for enhanced access to justice and access to information.

- As young people, we can contribute to a long-term commitment to climate and energy goals. The involvement of youth can encourage them to take an active role in sustainability and climate action throughout their lives.
- Youth participation can help hold governments and decision-makers accountable for meeting their climate and energy targets. It ensures a more diverse set of perspectives at the decision-making table, including those from underrepresented or marginalised groups.
- Youth can provide insights into how to make energy and climate targets more adaptable and resilient to future challenges, as they will be dealing with the long-term consequences of today's decisions.

At YEE we have researched how young people exercise their rights with respect to the Aarhus convention, most recently concerning the revision of the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs). The plans were due in June this year, shaping the future energy and climate policies of EU member states. Our research indicates poor exercise of these rights among European youth, as they have rarely participated in consultation processes related

to the NECPs. Member States' and EU's failure to involve younger generations and their representative organisations has undermined the rights of those who will bear the consequences of NECPs outcomes well into the future.

Within our advocacy work, [we have also equipped young people](#) with concrete mechanisms to participate in the process of drafting and implementation of their national energy and climate plans (NECPs), as well as information about energy and climate issues that are crucial for the future of the EU. We have conducted consultations with youth and non-youth NGOs to understand if the Aarhus rights were exercised by young people during NECPs processes.

Moreover, many civil society organisations, including YEE, have already called EU member states to establish accessible, permanent multistakeholder dialogues as part of the Multilevel Energy and Climate Dialogues (MCED) framework to ensure sustained and inclusive involvement, which would be highly relevant to ensure, among others, participation from young people. Ad hoc consultations have proven insufficient for effective youth engagement. Establishing a permanent framework will facilitate smoother and more inclusive participation in processes like the NECPs.

In light of this, it is extremely urgent to safeguard the effective exercise of these rights among Member States and the international community, particularly amidst the observed shrinking of civic space. It is also imperative to safeguard democratic participation rights among the youth population to encourage more ambitious and effective climate action.

To ensure the support of capacity-building and awareness raising in relation to the rights protected by the Convention, access to justice and access to information, we propose the following recommendations to Parties:

- Implementation of capacity-building programs in schools and universities, offering both short-term, specialised sessions on relevant legislation; and long-term, comprehensive courses on participatory rights concerning environmental issues.
- Simplifications of legally complex matters related to the exercise of participation rights in the context of environmental matters. This could be by measures such as but not limited to the creation of plain language summaries, visual representation, case studies and examples relating to the national level and education and awareness campaigns.

- Integration of specific assessments of the relevancy of Aarhus principles to young people through a dedicated checklist.¹
- Inclusion of criteria for youth engagement in relation to environmental matters, prompting all Parties to develop and implement novel instruments in support of this.

These measures will contribute to better capable and aware young individuals - the foundation of the future world which the youth and future generations will inherit, a future world for which we have to take great care.

It is of utmost importance that the youth have a strong say and have the right to inherit a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

Thank you.

¹ A good practice is the [EU Youth Test](#) - a tool designed to bring young people into the heart of policy making and see every new legislative proposal through a youth lens. More information to be found [here](#).