

Motion

Together with the youth of Serbia against escalating repression and youth rights violations

Signed by: National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS)

1. Introduction: rights under attack

Youth rights in Serbia are under sustained attack. Since November 2024, peaceful youth mobilisation has been met with escalating repression, revealing a broader pattern of democratic backsliding. This motion highlights that the deterioration of youth security, the deliberate weakening of the youth sector, and the systematic suppression of participation are not isolated trends, but a coordinated erosion of young people's living conditions and their ability to shape public life. The consequences extend beyond Serbia, testing Europe's commitment to human rights, rule of law, and democratic participation, and requiring a clear and principled response.

This document builds on the National Youth Council of Serbia's (KOMS) previous reporting in line with the Motions adopted by the European Youth Forum in 2024 and 2025.

In 2026, the situation has further deteriorated: while the student movement has evolved into a significant political actor, repressive practices by public authorities have intensified. Institutional mechanisms intended to protect young people and enable their participation have been weakened or rendered ineffective.

As rights violations have become too numerous to document, this motion focuses on four key areas: youth security, the state of the youth sector and youth participation and the action Serbian authorities must take.

2. Youth Security: escalating repression

The security of young people in Serbia has deteriorated sharply in the past year. According to KOMS' own 'Security Compass' report, between November 2024 and November 2025, young people faced extensive legal proceedings for protesting: 150 were arrested or detained for violent conduct, 337 faced proceedings for obstruction of an official, and 1,787 criminal charges were filed for endangering public traffic, a provision applied against students participating in traffic blockades. Although 115 complaints of police misconduct were filed, none resulted in disciplinary or criminal action as of the publishing of the report.¹

Among young people who participated in protests — 77% of the survey sample — 11.5% reported experiencing physical violence by police, with 10.1% experiencing it from counter-protesters. Around 17.6% of respondents reported experiencing verbal violence, and a further 34.8% witnessed police physically assault other protesters. Amnesty International condemned the indiscriminate targeting of peaceful demonstrators in Serbia.²

The true number of cases of violence and rights violations committed against young people and all those who support the student movement are likely to be higher, with brutality escalating as well, such as the case of a young journalist whose skull was broken by a group of assailants in March 2026, among many attacks other attacks to journalists across different municipalities.³

These events are deepening an already severe crisis of institutional trust. Young people in Serbia identify violations of civil rights by state authorities as the single greatest threat to their personal safety — above organised crime, digital violence, or armed conflict. Over the past year, more than half of young people avoided protests out of fear and over a third refrained from expressing opinions on social media. Trust in the government,

1. <https://koms.rs/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/SECURITY-COMPASS-2026-.pdf>

2. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/07/serbia-authorities-must-end-unlawful-use-of-force-against-protesters-and-investigate-reports-of-police-violence/>

3. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2026/03/30/serbia-brutal-assaults-on-journalists-reporting-on-the-local-election-require-urgent-response-from-authorities/>

the President, and the National Assembly thus hovers between 1.17 and 1.29 on a 5-point scale, marking a historic low-point.⁴

This crisis risks becoming permanent through the so-called “Mrđić laws” — amendments to five judicial laws adopted on 28 January 2026 in an emergency procedure without public debate. As stated in the urgent review produced by the Venice Commission on 24 April,⁵ these laws represent an attack on the rule of law. They increase government influence over the appointment and organisation of prosecutors and weaken judicial independence. For young people, who already lack trust in institutions that are meant to protect their rights, the weakening of judicial independence removes even more of the legal protection that they should be able to rely on.⁶

3. Youth Sector: weakening under political pressure

More than a year since Criminal Police Administration entered the premises of five organisations, including KOMS,⁷ there has been no follow up regarding these investigations. Since early 2025, the youth sector in Serbia has faced a deterioration of institutional support.

On 22 December 2025, the Ministry of Tourism and Youth cancelled the operational grants and thus stopped supporting the programme work of youth umbrella organisations for the first time in more than ten years. This impacts KOMS as the National Youth Council of Serbia, the association of youth workers (NAPOR), the Scout Association of Serbia and others, as well as more than 100 member organisations. Likewise, the National Programme for the Improvement of Youth Mental Health was abruptly discontinued without explanation or any plan for continuation.⁸

Furthermore, KOMS’ analysis of the open calls of the Ministry of Tourism and Youth in 2025 shows concerns regarding transparency and the allocation of public funds. One third of the organisations that received public funding had little or no visible activity in the youth sector, including no functioning websites. At the same time, organisations with long-term experience and recognised roles in youth policy development were excluded from support.⁹

There remain serious transparency problems in the evaluation process, with delayed results, unclear scoring and the lack of any legal recourse for organisations which did not receive funds. The 2025 open calls weakened the youth sector by diverting funds to organisations with questionable credibility and independence, with no sign of improvement for 2026.

4. <https://koms.rs/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/ALTERNATIVE-REPORT-2025.pdf>

5. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/venice-commission/-/cdl-pi-2026-007-e>

6. <https://www.dw.com/en/serbia-critics-decry-attack-on-judicial-independence-and-increase-in-political-control-of-judiciary/a-75799216>

7. <https://balkancsd.net/bcsdn-condemns-targeted-institutional-pressure-on-civic-initiatives-and-civil-society-in-serbia/>

8. https://koms.rs/2025/12/srbija_drzava_koja_urusava_sistem_brige_o_mladima/

9. https://koms.rs/2025/09/analysis_of_the_2025_call_for_proposals/

Additionally, a trend in youth sector funding that KOMS has observed through participation in policy-making processes such as the working group on the Youth Strategy Action Plan 2026-2028, is an increasing tendency to redirect public funds towards local public institutions. This does not just lead to fewer resources for youth organisations, it also excludes them from policy-making, harming youth participation on the local level.

Civil society in general continues to face political pressure, including public targeting by officials and delegitimising rhetoric against organisations such as the Center for Youth Integration and the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy. In January 2026, Civic Initiatives was also subjected to a coordinated pro-government media campaign, reflecting an ongoing pattern of smear campaigns. Announced (albeit unspecified) changes to the Law on Associations by the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue could further deteriorate the position of pro-democratic forces.¹⁰

4. Youth Participation: systematic barriers and suppression

Youth participation in public and political life in Serbia remains severely constrained. Formal mechanisms have become ineffective: the Advisory Council on Youth, envisioned to counsel the government on youth issues, met only once last year, despite the Law on Youth prescribing a minimum of two sessions per year. Civil society's participation in the Council for Civil Society, which oversees the implementation of the Strategy for Creating an Enabling Environment for the Development of Civil Society, remains frozen until conditions improve. Young people are structurally under-represented, holding just 2.4% of seats in the National Assembly despite comprising 16.8% of the population.¹¹

Participation is currently suppressed at every level, as young people and their organisations who express critical voices are excluded, attacked and pressured. Their influence will be even further marginalised as the government amended its Rules of Procedure in March 2026 to remove obligations for ministries to conduct and publish regulatory impact assessments, limit the scope of mandatory public consultations and narrow when expert reviews of draft laws are needed. This continues a trend of weakening transparency and accountability in law-making.¹²

Young people see voting as the primary form of legitimate participation. However, nearly nine out of ten young people perceive elections as neither free nor fair. The 29 March 2026 local elections in 10 municipalities proved young people's perceptions to be correct. The observation delegation from the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities documented acts of violence, heated arguments, and the threatening presence of large groups of people – unidentified and sometimes masked - in nearly all 10 municipalities.¹³ Meanwhile, pre-election media cam-

10. Monitoring Matrix on Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development, Country Report: Serbia 2025, Balkan Civil Society Development Network, available in June 2026

11. <https://koms.rs/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/ALTERNATIVE-REPORT-2025.pdf>

12. <https://www.vranjenews.rs/news/ispod-radara-pro%C5%A1la-odluka-vlade-da-se-oslobodi-javnosti-i-odgovornosti-pogubnije-od-mrdi%C4%87evih>

13. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/-/congress-to-observe-local-elections-in-10-municipalities-of-serbia>

paigns of the ruling coalition targeted and demonised oppositional student lists as enemies of the public, marginalising local topics in favour of national ones. Such conditions call into question the legitimacy of elections.

Unless institutional participation is strengthened and trust restored, dissatisfaction among youth will increasingly be expressed outside formal channels, through continuation of protests, blockades and other forms, leading to political radicalisation and further deterioration of youth security.

5. Calls to Action

The European Youth Forum thus calls upon the Serbian authorities to:

Youth Security

- End politically-motivated criminal prosecutions, misdemeanor proceedings and other forms of targeting of young activists, their families and those who support them;
- Prosecute all individuals responsible for unlawful violence against young people, including members of security forces;
- Sanction media outlets and public officials who propagate hate speech or engage in discrimination based on political affiliation through reforms of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media;
- Ensure the independence of judiciary and revoke “Mrdić” amendments to judicial laws.

Youth Sector

- Halt politically-motivated repression of youth organisations;
- Reform public funding mechanisms in the youth sector to enhance transparency, accountability, and fairness of evaluation processes while enabling relevant complaint mechanisms;¹⁴
- Reinstate operating grants for umbrella youth associations and financing of the Youth Mental Health programme;
- Ensure inclusive and participatory youth policymaking by formally recognising and involving youth organisations in all stages of public policy processes, preventing the exclusion of civil society actors and the overt centralisation of responsibilities within public institutions.

14. <https://koms.rs/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/BELA-KNJIGA.pdf>

Youth Participation

- Ensure safe and inclusive youth participation at all levels;
- Uphold the principles of free and fair elections as defined in the Council of Europe's Reykjavík Declaration;¹⁵
- Fully implement all relevant OSCE/ODIHR and European Commission recommendations to reform and strengthen electoral processes.¹⁶

15. <https://edoc.coe.int/en/the-council-of-europe-in-brief/11619-united-around-our-values-reykjavik-declaration.html>

16. https://odhr.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/1/3/563505_0.pdf https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/serbia-report-2025_en



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