

West Africa Youth Democracy Conference (WAYDC)

Dakar, Senegal, 8-10 September 2026

REGIONAL COMMUNIQUÉ OF DAKAR

Preamble

We, the participants of the West Africa Youth Democracy Conference (WAYDC), gathered in Dakar from September 8 to 10, 2026, at the invitation of the ECOWAS Commission, Legis360, with support from the EU Support to ECOWAS Peace, Security and Governance (EPSG) project, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and co-financed by the European Union and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark;

Considering that young people represent 70% of the region's population and that this demographic group is expected to grow further by 2035, making West Africa the youngest region in the world;

Recalling the findings of the ECOWAS Election Observation Missions (EOM) in Nigeria (2023), Sierra Leone (2023), The Gambia (2021 and 2022), Liberia (2023), Ghana (2024), and Côte d'Ivoire (2025), which repeatedly documented the structural exclusion of young people from electoral and governance processes;

Recognizing the ECOWAS Vision 2050, ECOWAS of the People, Peace and Security;

Noting with satisfaction the success of the pilot project Mainstreaming Youth into ECOWAS Election Observation Mission (EYEOM), which integrated 22 young observers from 11 ECOWAS Member States during the 2025 Cote d'Ivoire presidential election, demonstrating that when young people are prepared and empowered, they effectively contribute meaningfully to and affirm electoral integrity;

Deeply concerned by:

- the absence of binding legal frameworks in Member States guaranteeing youth participation and effective political inclusion;
- financial barriers (nomination fees, campaign costs) that nullify the legal eligibility gained in some countries;
- weak implementation of existing policies and the lack of monitoring and sanction mechanisms;
- digital restrictions (internet shutdowns, disinformation) that hinder young people's democratic participation;
- growing apathy among young people and their loss of trust in democratic institutions;

Reaffirming that the exclusion of youths is not only a democratic challenge, but also an issue of regional peace and security, as highlighted by high-level contributions during the Conference;

Hereby declare as follows:

Article 1 – Commitment to Removing Legal and Financial Barriers

1.1. We urge Member States to adopt specific legislation (quota laws, reduction of candidacy fees, campaign spending caps) in order to remove financial barriers to young people entering politics, drawing inspiration from recommendations derived from thematic laboratories.

1.2. We recommend the establishment of monitoring and sanction mechanisms to ensure the effective application of laws promoting youth and women inclusion, with an enhanced role for parliamentarians in oversight of the executive.

1.3. We call upon Member States and development partners to invest in youth economic empowerment (employment, entrepreneurship, access to finance) as a prerequisite for sustainable political participation, so that they are not excluded from electoral processes for financial reasons.

1.4. We request political parties to democratize their internal operations, guarantee transparent candidate selection procedures, and open leadership bodies to young people and women.

Article 2 – Commitment to Sustained Youth Engagement Throughout the Electoral Cycle

2.1. We call upon Member States and ECOWAS to establish mentorship and coaching programmes for young people to transfer the knowledge and experience necessary for effective political participation.

2.2. We recommend that youth engagement should not be limited to election periods, but be continuous: before, during, and after elections, through capacity building initiatives, training, and intergenerational dialogue.

2.3. We emphasize the importance of civic and voter education from an early age, specifically targeting youth and women, to foster interest in public affairs and prepare them to exercise responsible leadership.

Article 3 – Commitment to Digital Democracy and Responsible Artificial Intelligence Use.

3.1. We call upon ECOWAS to finalize and operationalize the framework for the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by Election Management Bodies, guaranteeing the protection of electoral integrity against the risks of disinformation, deepfakes, and manipulation.

3.2. We urge Member States to invest in digital civic education to train young people in detecting false information and the responsible use of social media platforms.

3.3. We request ECOWAS to exert diplomatic pressure on States that restrict access to the Internet and social media during electoral periods, in contradiction with democratic principles and norms.

Article 4 – Launch and Operationalization of the West Africa Youth Observers Network (WAYON)

4.1. We endorse the creation of the West Africa Youth Observers Network (WAYON) as a permanent platform for capacity building, advocacy, and exchange among young observers in the region, anchored to ECOWAS and hosted by Legis360 Centre for Advocacy, Development and Public Enlightenment Initiative, with the support of other partners.

4.2. We call upon Member States and partners to support WAYON in developing its activities (training, observation missions, data collection, and sharing) and ensuring its financial sustainability.

4.3. The Network will be equipped with a governance framework including a Steering Committee, focal points in each ECOWAS Member State, and a digital platform to facilitate exchange and coordination.

4.4. WAYON's operations will be coordinated by the ECOWAS Commission in close collaboration with relevant partners.

Article 5 – Follow-up and Implementation of Commitments

5.1. This Communiqué is submitted to the ECOWAS Department of Political Affairs, Peace, and Security (PAPS) for integration into ongoing programmes and protocols. Its operationalization will be subjected to the furtherance of and alignment with existing ECOWAS normative instruments.

5.2. We ask ECOWAS and its partners such as GIZ/EPSCG, EU, Denmark to integrate youth inclusion indicators and the recommendations of this Communiqué into their 2026-2027 work plan.

5.3. A biennial monitoring mechanism will be established under the auspices of ECOWAS, in collaboration with Legis360 and partners, to evaluate progress made in implementing these recommendations.

Final Provisions

This Communiqué, adopted by acclamation in Dakar on September 10, 2026, is a call to action for all stakeholders: Member States, regional institutions, political parties, civil society organizations, media, technical and financial partners, and above all, young people themselves.

We commit to moving from words to action, to building together a West Africa where youth participation is practical, continuous, and essential, not symbolic, seasonal, or deferred to the future, and where every young person can fully contribute to consolidating peace, democracy, and development in our region.

Done this Day,

Thursday, 10 September 2026 in Dakar, Senegal