

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 376 (2015)¹

Bringing down barriers to youth participation: adopting a lingua franca for local and regional authorities and young people

1. If citizenship is the result of both participation and inclusion in a certain societal system, it can be said that the crisis and the connected risk of personal immobility and social invisibility are eroding young people's citizenship, that is, their possibility to understand themselves, to act and to be recognised as full members of society. Young people's rejection of politics can be seen as a symbol of the society which they feel has betrayed and alienated them, while the new practices of civic involvement they use for expressing their needs are sometimes perceived as anti-political or apolitical.

2. Young people give shape to their personal idea of citizenship and how to engage in society on their own from their experiences in the home, friendship groups, school and neighbourhood. School is a place where everyday citizenship issues should be addressed and where political systems and participation can be learnt. In addition, it represents a space where it is easier to reach the more marginalised groups of the youth population.

3. Young people have been hardest hit by the effects of the economic and financial crisis. Negative trends in the labour market, increased competition for jobs, increasingly insecure work contracts, protracted and complicated life trajectories, as well as inadequate social protection, are all factors that hinder the transition to adulthood. Civic and political engagement, as well as socio-economic inclusion, are elements of citizenship that cannot be separated.

4. Young people are increasingly making use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as instruments for participation; however access to computers and to the Internet is still defined by income or education, but also by the geographical area of residence, for example, urban versus rural areas. In order to promote a culture of communication based on the use of ICTs, equal access to the Internet is necessary.

5. Finally, in order to understand the meaning of the new forms of expression of youth involvement, it is of paramount importance to explore the decline in the more conventional forms of involvement.

6. The Congress refers to its recommendation to the Committee of Ministers to invite member States to strengthen the political influence and participation of young people through the offer of more citizenship rights, for example by investigating the possibility of lowering the voting age to 16 as proposed in Resolution 1826 (2011) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16.

7. In light of the above, the Congress recommends that the Committee of Ministers invite member States to:

a. introduce, in schools within their competence, citizenship, human rights and democracy education, including teaching on how political systems work;

b. introduce school students to the responsibilities of and opportunities for participation at an early stage in their lives by implementing a system of school joint management boards, which would constitute spaces for dialogue and consultation;

c. ensure policies are adopted which give young people access to their social rights, such as employment, housing and social protection by making more resources available to those institutions working on youth-related issues at various governmental levels, for example youth ministries;

d. reduce the digital divide by ensuring equal access to the Internet in all areas, both urban and rural.

8. The Committee of Ministers may wish to invite the Joint Council on Youth (CMJ) to consider:

a. undertaking a mapping exercise of existing legal frameworks, structures and practices of participation of young people in decision-making processes at local and regional levels;

b. organising jointly with the Congress a conference on youth participation so as to promote dialogue between Congress members and young people;

c. exploring the current opportunities for youth participation in political parties and trade unions at local, regional, national and European levels in order to show the state of youth political participation in Europe.

9. Finally, the Congress requests that the Committee of Ministers invite member States to consider making voluntary contributions to help finance its efforts to promote the participation of young Europeans in its work through a new mechanism for structured dialogue and their continued active participation in the sessions.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 20 October 2015, 1st Sitting (see Document [CG/2015\(29\)7FINAL](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: Malcolm Byrne, Ireland (R, ILDG).