
Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on young people and climate action

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 23 October 2024
at the 1510th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

Preamble

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe (ETS No. 1),

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve greater unity between its members, for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress;

Considering that member States of the Council of Europe have committed themselves to ensuring the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5, "the Convention") to everyone within their jurisdiction, and recalling their obligation to refrain from human rights violations;

Having regard to the European Social Charter (adopted in 1961, ETS No. 35, and subsequently amended and supplemented by its additional protocols ETS Nos. 128 (1988), 142 (1991) and 158 (1995) and revised in 1996, ETS No. 163), as applied and interpreted by the European Committee of Social Rights;

Recalling Resolution CM/Res(2020)2 on the Council of Europe youth sector strategy 2030, in particular the priority on "young people's access to rights, with special emphasis on: ... improving institutional responses to emerging issues affecting young people's rights and their transition to adulthood, such as, but not limited to, the effects of climate change and environmental degradation";

Recalling the applicability of existing principles set out in relevant recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to the member States, in particular: Recommendations CM/Rec(2022)20 on human rights and the protection of the environment; CM/Rec(2022)6 on protecting youth civil society and young people, and supporting their participation in democratic processes; CM/Rec(2017)4 on youth work; CM/Rec(2016)7 on young people's access to rights; CM/Rec(2015)3 on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights; CM/Rec(2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18; CM/Rec(2010)8 on youth information; CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education; CM/Rec(2007)14 on the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe; Rec(2006)1 on the role of national youth councils in youth policy development; Rec(2004)20 on judicial review of administrative acts and Rec(2004)13 on the participation of young people in local and regional life;

Bearing in mind relevant recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, notably: Recommendation 2211 (2021) "Anchoring the right to a healthy environment: need for enhanced action by the Council of Europe"; Recommendation 2212 (2021) "More participatory democracy to tackle climate change"; Recommendation 2214 (2021) "The climate crisis and the rule of law"; Recommendation 2213 (2021) "Addressing issues of criminal and civil liability in the context of climate change", as well as Resolution 2565 (2024) on "Safeguarding human rights for future generations";

Taking note of the principles emerging from the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and decisions and conclusions of the European Committee of Social Rights;

Recalling that United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 48/13 of 8 October 2021 and United Nations General Assembly Resolution 76/300 of 28 July 2022 recognise the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right that is important for the enjoyment of human rights and is related to other rights and existing international law;

Having regard to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention);

Recalling the "Framework principles on human rights and the environment" (2018) of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment and the report "Right to a healthy environment: good practices" (2019);

Noting the increased recognition of some form of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, *inter alia*, in international instruments, including regional human rights instruments, and national constitutions, legislation and policies;

Conscious of the need for States to respect the rights and knowledge of indigenous peoples and of local communities, in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and international human rights law, without discrimination;

Recalling the European Declaration on Global Education to 2050 (Dublin Declaration, 4 November 2022), which calls for a European strategy framework to improve and increase global education in Europe by the year 2050;

Recalling the Reykjavík Declaration "United around our values" from the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (16-17 May 2023) which underlines "the urgency of additional efforts to protect the environment, as well as to counter the impact of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity on human rights, democracy and the rule of law";

Recognising that, in light of the clear and growing scientific evidence, a state of climate and environmental emergency exists, and that urgent action is required of all actors to mitigate and adapt to climate change and the loss of biological diversity,

Recommends that the governments of the member States:

1. promote and apply the measures proposed in the appendix to this recommendation, which aim to protect the rights of young people and young environmental defenders; remove barriers to their participation in climate-related decision-making processes, in particular socio-economic ones; provide tailored resources for all methodologies of education and learning, such as formal and non-formal education, as well as youth work, in climate issues and activism; ensure the provision of free, youth-friendly health services that care for young people experiencing health issues as a result of climate change, especially those related to their mental and physical well-being; ensure full access to climate-related information and data; and address all forms of discrimination experienced by young people in relation to the climate crisis and their activism;
2. give due consideration, when implementing these measures, to the specific needs and situations of all young people in all their diversity, including young environmental defenders, and especially youth facing social inequalities and/or with fewer opportunities, those in vulnerable situations and from marginalised or disadvantaged groups, including Indigenous peoples;
3. translate and disseminate widely this recommendation and its appendix (including in accessible and youth-friendly formats), especially among national, regional and local authorities and key stakeholders, in particular those addressing climate and/or youth-related issues;
4. invite local and regional authorities to implement those measures in this recommendation that fall within their sphere of competence;

5. review, within the Committee of Ministers, the implementation of this recommendation by member States five years after its adoption and every five years thereafter.

Appendix to Recommendation CM/Rec(2024)6

Scope and purpose

1. This recommendation aims to address the challenges faced by all young people, and in particular young environmental defenders, especially when advocating for a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, including challenges to the exercise, enjoyment and fulfilment of their fundamental civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Climate action is one of the top priorities of young people in Europe. Youth participation in decision-making processes improves the effectiveness of climate policies and young people need to be given the necessary support and resources for their climate advocacy, and adequate social and legal protection.

2. The recommendation aims to encourage member States to:

- safeguard the rights enshrined in the Convention and the European Social Charter, ensure all young people have full access to those rights and that equitable and proportionate legal means are used in procedures concerning youth, including young environmental defenders, in the application of those rights;
- ensure meaningful participation in climate-related decision-making processes by reaching out to and engaging in dialogue with young people and by establishing and strengthening accessible consultation mechanisms and platforms, and in particular removing all structural barriers to young people's participation;
- allocate sufficient resources to develop green jobs and offer opportunities for young people to make informed decisions and choices, through formal and non-formal education and learning, as well as lifelong learning, and to equip them with the necessary competences to excel in roles that respect and work to protect the environment;
- recognise the importance of youth work, by both paid and volunteer youth workers, in helping young people to acquire knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for their engagement with climate action;
- address any possible shortcomings in the provision of youth-friendly health services to ensure they can protect and safeguard young people's emotional, psychological and physical well-being, especially in view of the effects of climate change on health;
- ensure young people have access to evidence-based climate-related information and data, through effective and diverse communication channels, including in accessible and youth-friendly formats, as well as in minority languages;
- tackle all forms of discrimination, especially racism and gender inequality, which are strongly intertwined with the climate crisis, and promote intergenerational solidarity and equity, as well as climate justice, which aims to ensure that responses to climate change are equitable and fair.

Principles

4. The climate crisis is having a major impact on the lives of young people and their enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The rights of young people are consistently challenged, both in terms of the lack of opportunities offered to them and of an increased risk of precariousness caused, *inter alia*, by their limited access to opportunities, resources, support systems and decision-making processes, despite ongoing efforts to voice their concerns. Considering that the sustainability of any democratic society relies on the creativity, dynamism, social commitment and competences of its young people, this recommendation aims to address the needs of young people and young environmental defenders across Europe when advocating for climate action.

Measures

5. The following measures aim to address and fill policy gaps pertaining to young people's climate action and create a clear interconnection between their climate advocacy and their enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The standards referred to herein stem mainly from the Council of Europe youth sector's policy guidance which aims at enabling young people to actively uphold, defend, promote and benefit from the Organisation's core values; creating an enabling environment for the unconditional full exercise of their human rights and freedoms; and their becoming informed and active citizens and agents of change. As people in vulnerable situations, including young people from disadvantaged, marginalised and Indigenous backgrounds bear the brunt of many climate-related adversities, the measures addressed to member States refer also to people in vulnerable situations, to ensure that policies respond to their specific needs and the distinct challenges they face.

Ensuring young people's access to rights

Member States should:

- ensure that the existing rights enshrined in the Convention are respected, protected and fulfilled at all times, such as the right to life (Article 2), the right to respect for private and family life (Article 8), the right to respect for home (Article 8) and the right to protection of property (Article 1 of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention, ETS No. 9) in the context of the anthropogenic emission of greenhouse gases that cause global warming, which in turn have profound adverse effects, including on youth;
- ensure that the existing rights guaranteed by the European Social Charter are respected, protected and fulfilled at all times, such as the right to protection of health (Article 11), the right to safe and healthy working conditions (Article 3) and the right of children and young persons to protection (Article 7);
- respect, protect and fulfil the rights of young people to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 9 of the Convention), freedom of expression (Article 10), freedom of assembly and association (Article 11) and the right to a fair trial (Article 6), by authorising peaceful public gatherings and demonstrations by young people, eliminating reprisal, punishment or detention, and by deterring unlawful and unjustified threats, including from third parties;
- ensure that any barriers to young people's enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are permanently removed and that they have effective access to a judicial review in environmental matters;
- ensure the equitable and just treatment of young people following an assessment of policies and practices, by providing the necessary training to and protocols for police and law-enforcement agencies in best practices for law-enforcement responses, in particular with regard to the distinctive forms of gatherings, demonstrations and advocacy efforts favoured by environmental defenders, in order to respect their right to protection of their freedom of expression and to abstain from any recourse to a disproportionate use of force;
- ensure law-enforcement protocols are complied with and provide free, accessible legal and judicial support in instances of arrest, in accordance with Articles 3, 6 and 7 of the Convention, respectively the rights to prohibition of torture, a fair trial and the principle of no punishment without law;
- provide regular training and workshops to guide and inform the judiciary – judges and prosecutors – and legal practitioners, including other relevant professionals, on the prevailing legal, peaceful and unconventional methods of youth climate action to ensure that the outcomes of legal procedures are balanced, fair and proportionate, taking into account the cause and justifications provided by young people and young environmental defenders;
- respect in particular the rights of marginalised Indigenous young people, as well as those from disadvantaged backgrounds and in vulnerable situations, avoiding their discreditation, segregation or further marginalisation when they express their concerns about environmental degradation in public discourse;
- reflect on the nature, content and implications of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment and, on that basis, actively consider recognising at the national level this right as a human right, which is important for the enjoyment of human rights and is related to other rights and existing international law;

- continue to affirm that human rights and the environment are intertwined and that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of human rights by present and future generations.

Strengthening youth participation

Member States should:

- consult young people on their needs stemming from the consequences of the climate crisis and on their views on the actions to be taken in order to design more robust and inclusive policies that merge scientific evidence and first-hand experiences;
- build supportive environments for youth engagement and ensure the diverse representation and meaningful participation of young people, including marginalised youth and those from disadvantaged backgrounds and in vulnerable situations, in climate policy decision-making processes at all levels. Young people's involvement in policy making ensures that their needs, vulnerabilities, rights and agency are reflected in policies. However, it should not be limited to youth policies alone but integrated into all relevant sectors, given the complexity of the climate crisis and its consequences;
- inform young people of the conclusions of climate law, including legislation designed to promote young people's well-being and avoid harm caused by climate induced illness and policy decision-making processes and of the implementation and evaluation of the resulting policies and decisions;
- promote regulatory and legislative processes that actively involve young people and integrate their perspectives into policy making at the local, regional and national levels;
- build the capacity of and provide support, including financial support, to young people and youth organisations working on climate issues, so that they can co-create and evaluate actions with the authorities responsible for their implementation;
- respect the freedom of speech and expression and the autonomy of youth organisations and other youth-led climate movements, as safe spaces that can offer support, guidance and opportunities for young people who wish to engage in climate advocacy;
- remove restrictive social and gender barriers from decision-making processes when designing, establishing and evaluating policy-making bodies;
- cultivate in young people and children ecological awareness and a culture of commitment to the environment through education and learning, whether using formal or non-formal methodologies, in particular through climate-related curriculums in schools from early childhood through to tertiary and adult education, including in youth organisations and non-formal structures, and promote collaboration between teachers and youth workers on education for sustainable development.

Investing in green jobs, education and green skills

Member States should:

- allocate resources to formal and non-formal education frameworks, such as education for sustainable development, global youth work, global citizenship education and media and information literacy. These frameworks enable young people to obtain knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and agency to take critically informed decisions and play an active role when addressing climate issues, as well as to gain an understanding of advocacy strategies and tools;
- consider giving social recognition and value to the skills acquired by young environmental defenders through their activism, particularly when they transition into the labour market or educational programmes;
- increase investment in the creation of quality green jobs as a means of providing young people with employment and social protection, reducing poverty and improving social inclusion;

- facilitate a just transition for young people by developing opportunities for them to learn green skills and prepare them for these new job opportunities;
- dedicate funding to young green entrepreneurs through comprehensive, flexible and widely accessible micro-funding schemes, also as a means of contributing to young people's social inclusion and promoting their autonomy;
- increase funding for research and development in the green tech field, in order to create jobs for young researchers and help mitigate climate change, fostering energy efficiency and contributing to economic growth;
- devise specific funding schemes for youth organisations' climate-related projects which aim to increase skills and understanding and to support greater appreciation of climate issues among youth, especially marginalised or Indigenous young people and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Investing in tailored support to youth workers

Member States should:

- acknowledge the fundamental role of youth workers in accessing, mobilising and training young people and young environmental defenders in environmental and climate advocacy while ensuring sufficient funding for the youth work sector;
- provide youth workers with the financial resources necessary to develop and implement projects for climate action tailored to the needs and interests of young people;
- offer regular and tailored training and capacity building to youth workers to increase their proficiency in climate-related topics, including education for sustainable development and global citizenship education, in order to be able to share skills, knowledge, values and attitudes with young people and young environmental defenders to improve their environmental advocacy;
- ensure youth workers have access to up-to-date resources, including in digital formats, in different languages, as well as in accessible formats, to support the meaningful inclusion of all young people and young environmental defenders, in particular those from marginalised, underrepresented and disadvantaged groups;
- provide youth workers with the necessary training, skills and resources to empower young people with the essential competences to understand and critically assess climate-related information reported in all forms of media;
- support peer learning and exchanges on climate advocacy between youth workers and youth organisations, on local, regional, national and European levels, to share knowledge, experience and good practices, as well as to gain new perspectives and develop new skills;
- ensure buildings and accommodation provided by local, regional and national authorities to host youth work and youth activities, such as youth clubs, schools and youth centres, are built or renovated to be resilient to climate change so as to ensure optimal working and living conditions.

Ensuring access to healthcare and targeted youth services

Member States should:

- take necessary measures to mitigate the harmful consequences of the climate crisis on young people's health, both physical and mental;
- support independent and reliable research into the phenomenon of eco-anxiety, its treatment and care, and other adverse effects of the climate crisis on youth to develop knowledge, dedicated services and resources to support young people;

- organise awareness-raising campaigns about eco-anxiety among youth workers, teachers and non-teaching staff in schools, mental-healthcare providers and other relevant professionals, as well as of parents and guardians, and of young people themselves who may be unaware of the causes of symptoms they are experiencing; provide relevant training, tools and other resources to enable healthcare professionals to recognise symptoms and support those suffering from feelings of eco-anxiety;
- establish accessible health services specifically for young people related to their emotional and psychological well-being, with specially trained care providers, thereby allowing young people suffering from feelings of eco-anxiety and climate-induced health conditions to obtain early and preventive treatment; include young people in the planning, delivery and evaluation of such services;
- designate investments for biotechnology to facilitate medical advancements and improve the overall quality of healthcare, thereby reducing costs and improving access to care for disadvantaged demographics.

Accessing information and the right to be informed

Member States should:

- provide quality, reliable and youth-friendly information about environmental matters, based on reputable research and studies, mainly and preferably in digital formats, to young people, youth associations and relevant authorities as access to information is a prerequisite to participation and inclusion;
- ensure that environment-related information is presented in an accessible, youth-friendly format, available also in minority languages, to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities among young people, particularly those who are marginalised, from disadvantaged backgrounds or from Indigenous groups;
- establish legal and practical safeguards to limit the dissemination and spreading of disinformation or misinformation on environmental matters while protecting the right to freedom of expression and without undermining democracy.

Tackling discrimination and ensuring intergenerational equity

Member States should:

- acknowledge the important role of climate justice and a just transition when addressing adverse social, economic, public health and other effects of the climate crisis on young people, especially those who are marginalised, from disadvantaged backgrounds, in vulnerable situations or from Indigenous groups;
- include young people and young environmental defenders, particularly those from marginalised, disadvantaged or Indigenous groups, or those in vulnerable situations in the development of frameworks that move beyond climate change mitigation, such as transformational adaptation, to create and prioritise permanent resilience across all social groups;
- recognise the importance of intergenerational equity when tackling the climate crisis, by considering the establishment of relevant and focused institutions, such as a commissioner of future generations, to encourage government and public bodies to take a longer-term view on policy decisions that protect and promote the needs of future generations.